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Welcome to the latest issue of the *English Australia Journal*! At risk of starting on a slightly sombre note, it will also be my last issue, as after five fulfilling years, I will be stepping down from the Executive Editor position. It has been a privilege to work with the community of contributors – too many to name – who collectively make possible each issue of the *Journal*. The experience I’ve gained from this role is considerable, and I trust my successor will share my enthusiasm for this journal’s quality contribution to the scholarship of teaching in ELICOS, and more broadly, the international ELT field.

And I’m happy to say that this issue is a perfect example of the variety of research-based articles, interviews, voices from the classroom and reviews of resources that have come to characterise the *Journal* and make it such a trusted resource in the ELICOS community, and increasingly recognised in the wider TESOL literature.

First off, our peer-reviewed research articles include Emily Edward’s research into teachers’ experiences and managers’ perceptions of the Cambridge Assessment English/English Australia Action Research in ELICOS program. Despite the many reported benefits of the program – as evidenced by the number of published articles by participants in this journal alone – Emily presents readers with some potentially constraining tensions that exist. This article should be seriously considered by ELICOS management as well as teacher action researchers.

Next, Margaret Kettle, Bronwyn Watson and Daniel Murphy outline a practitioner-focused project in which Bronwyn and Daniel identified issues with providing feedback on writing in their EAP courses. Through reading the research literature on written corrective feedback, they reflect on how theory and research findings can inform improvements to their classroom practice.

Finally, Sarah Wilson presents us with a fascinating account of her action research ‘Rejection Project’ aimed at encouraging her students to take risks in the community by approaching members of the public and making a variety of requests. Sarah provides readers with evidence of the success of the project and a procedure for carrying it out, and it’s impossible not to feel curious and inspired by her journey.
In Sophia Khan’s Ten Questions, Antonia Clare (ELT coursebook writer, teacher trainer and plenary speaker at the 2018 English Australia conference) raises some thought-provoking points about materials writing and the role of materials in ELT. Amongst other things, you will learn about how the PARSNIP concept impacts on the materials you are probably using in the courses you teach! Sophia’s Classroom Talk section also brings us articles about the role of e-learning, drama, and multimedia in the classroom, with some great, practical ideas from the authors.

Reviews Editor Richard Ingold has also been working with a busy group of contributors to provide us with reviews of practical and theoretical resources for IELTS preparation, teacher development, implementing technology in the classroom, exploratory action research, and much more. Many thanks to the wonderful practitioners who contribute their time and expertise to provide us with a steady stream of critical reviews for this invaluable section of the Journal. We are always looking out for new reviewers, so please drop Richard a line if you’d like to be considered.

Before I leave you, and for one last time in my role as editor, let me express our heartfelt thanks to the folk behind the scenes who bring all the Journal’s articles and reviews to life. Thanks to the Editorial Board, who conduct reviews and provide support for editorial decisions, and to the many generous academics who volunteer their time to peer-review and comment on the research articles. Thanks and appreciation to Derek Trow, who works tirelessly behind the scenes ensuring we have a high quality design, and that the printed and online versions are rolled out in good time. Last but not least, thanks also to the English Australia Secretariat for its ongoing support and resourcing of the Journal.

Again, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to be working with, and for, all the Journal’s many stakeholders over the past six years. We have come a long way, and I hope the next five years is just as exciting.

Phil Chappell
Executive Editor
journal@englishaustralia.com.au

Sophia Khan
Classroom Talk Editor
classroomtalk@englishaustralia.com.au

Richard Ingold
Reviews Editor
reviews@englishaustralia.com.au
Embracing action research: Current tensions and possible directions

EMILY EDWARDS
University of Technology, Sydney

This article reports on findings from a qualitative study in the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) context which explored teachers’ experiences and their managers’ perceptions of teacher participation in the Cambridge Assessment English/English Australia Action Research in ELICOS program. Despite previously reported benefits for teachers’ professional development as a result of action research participation, the study found that some current tensions may be limiting the potential and sustainability of the English Australia Action Research program for the development of teachers, ELICOS centres and the sector as a whole. This article explores four key tensions and offers some possible ways in which the tensions can be addressed within ELICOS centres and more broadly. These tensions and directions are also likely to be relevant to other ELT contexts in which teachers are conducting action research.

Introduction

Teacher research is becoming a popular form of ongoing professional development for English language teachers around the world. Over the last decade, action research (AR) – viewed as one type of teacher research that follows a particular cyclical approach (Borg, 2010; Burns, 2014) – has been supported by Cambridge Assessment English in both Australia and the UK. In Australia, an annual AR program was established in 2009 by English Australia in collaboration with Professor Anne Burns, and almost 90 ELICOS teachers from around the country have now participated in the program.

It is generally agreed that English language teachers benefit from AR in many ways (Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez, & Vélez, 2013; Burns, 2014; Edwards & Burns, 2016a, 2016b; Wang & Zhang, 2014), and participating in AR can even be a catalyst for sustained teacher professional development that continues years after initial AR engagement (Dikilitaş, 2016; Edwards & Burns, 2016a). In this article, ‘development’ is viewed from a sociocultural perspective to be a process involving both ‘cognitions’
(internalising new knowledge, perceptions or beliefs) and ‘identities’ (continuously re-negotiating a sense of self) (van Lier, 2008). Development is considered a long-term continuous and dynamic process and can be observed when teachers make ‘sustained changes’ (Grimmett, 2014, p. 10) to their practice, understandings, engagement with others, or sense of self. Achieving sustainable professional development requires institutional contexts to embrace and support teachers’ efforts in continuing their AR enquiries after their initial AR projects, implementing their new knowledge, and developing their professional identities as teacher-researchers (Edwards & Burns, 2016b; Eun, 2008).

Unfortunately, the potential impact of teacher research can often be limited by a multitude of tensions (Berger, Boles, & Troen, 2005; Borg, 2013; Ellis, 2014; Yuan & Mak, 2016), and the ELICOS sector has its own contextual issues such as quality, ethics, and low teacher salaries (Stanley, 2016, 2017). The purpose of the current article is to explore some of the tensions relating to the professional development of teachers who have participated in the English Australia AR program, since these tensions remain unexplored in the literature. The tensions arose from a large dataset of surveys and interviews with ELICOS teachers involved in the program, and some of their managers.

This article argues that there are currently missed opportunities for sustained teacher-, institutional- and sector-level development resulting from ELICOS teachers’ participation in the English Australia AR program. In making this argument, it should be noted that embracing AR would not be suitable in every context, for example when centres have a minimal budget for professional development activities, or a high number of novice teachers. Novice teachers would perhaps benefit more from further study such as a Cambridge Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (DELTA) or master’s degree to extend their knowledge and practice, before engaging in AR. However, the English Australia AR program is now well established as a voluntary professional development option for many ELICOS teachers, and it seems to have the potential to be much more beneficial to many ELICOS teachers and centres than it currently is. In order to address missed opportunities, some recommendations for ELICOS policy and practice will be made.

The following review of relevant literature covers the reported benefits of the English Australia AR program, the tensions that tend to characterise teacher research, and then focuses specifically on issues in the ELICOS context.

**The English Australia AR program and its benefits**

Since 2010, a group of 6–12 ELICOS teachers have participated in the English Australia AR program each year, bringing the total to almost 90 teachers engaging in 55 AR
studies – some teachers working individually, but most working in pairs. Teachers volunteer their participation, and must have the written support of their managers in advance. Every year (apart from 2010 and 2011), a broad theme such as ‘assessment’, ‘reading’ or ‘writing’ guides teachers in focusing their projects, and within the theme they choose a specific topic arising from their own teaching contexts. This topic is explored through AR cycles of plan – act – observe – reflect. The current model for the program is shown in Figure 1. The program is structured around three face-to-face workshops between March and September, bringing participants from around Australia together to discuss their AR projects, and culminates in a colloquium at the annual English Australia conference in late September. The teachers present their AR projects at this colloquium, and then write reports for publication in *Cambridge English Research Notes*.

![Figure 1: Current model for the AR program (Burns & Edwards, 2014, p. 73)](image)

The English Australia AR program has had a profound impact on many of the participating teachers, especially at the level of the teachers’ individual professional development. This development has included enhanced confidence, improved knowledge about teaching, deeper connections with their students, greater engagement in and with research, and more explicit recognition from their managers and from the broader educational community (Burns, 2014; Edwards and Burns, 2016a). Analysing the experiences of two ELICOS teachers in depth, Edwards and Burns (2016b) found that the teachers negotiated new forms of professional identity as self-confident leaders and empowered teacher-researchers after participating in the program. These benefits are consistent with findings from other studies of English language teachers’ AR engagement (e.g., Banegas et al., 2013; Wang & Zhang, 2014).
Tensions involved in teacher research

Despite the benefits described above, there can be numerous tensions involved in teacher research. Firstly, teacher research can place heavy demands on teachers in terms of time and resources, with Allwright (2005) claiming that it is unrealistic and may even be ‘parasitic’ (p. 354) on the lives of teachers. Issues of power and ownership may also arise in teacher research programs. For example, Berger et al. (2005) found that teacher research must be championed by school managers, but at the same time teachers must have ownership of their projects. Tensions can also arise in university-school partnerships (Yuan & Mak, 2016) regarding scaffolding, autonomy and ownership of the research project, and a lack of understanding between teachers and academics about each other’s practices.

One of the main tensions discussed in the ELT literature relates to teacher and manager perceptions about research, and the resulting (pro- or anti-research) cultures that exist within ELT centres (Borg, 2013). I use the term ‘manager’ rather than ‘principal’ or ‘leader’, but with the same intended meaning, since it is commonly used within ELICOS and ELT. Borg explored managers’ and teachers’ conceptions of research in various ELT contexts worldwide, and concludes that both groups tend to adhere to a traditional view of research as scientific, involving large-scale, quantitative, statistically focused studies. He suggests that teachers’ beliefs may affect the ways they engage in and with research, and if these beliefs are not aligned with the characteristics of teacher research (small-scale, context-specific and personal), the result might be to ‘delegitimize teacher research . . . as a valuable and valid form of inquiry’ (p. 70). Of the 242 ELT managers Borg surveyed, 34% were unsure whether teacher research engagement enhanced teaching quality and a further 10% disagreed, indicating a high degree of uncertainty about the benefits. In terms of whole institutional cultures, Berger et al. (2005) suggest that teacher research may in fact be contrary to the culture of some schools in the current era of standardisation with its focus on individual achievement and the ‘increasing automation of teaching’ (p. 104).

Cultural beliefs or perceptions might also act as either constraints or facilitators of teacher research. For example, Ellis (2014) found that Singapore-based teachers’ cultural belief in ‘kiasuism’ (fear of losing out) led them to view teacher research as a source of competitive advantage over others, which drove them to participate but also limited the innovation of their projects. In the Australian context, a specific cultural phenomenon that may be relevant to teachers is ‘tall poppy syndrome’. The term ‘tall poppies’ can be applied to people who are high achievers, often in sport or in business, who ‘represent high ability or admirable qualities’ (Mancl & Penington, 2011, p. 79) and who become the object of others’ envy ( Feather, 1989). Feather explains that tall poppy syndrome involves the reported tendency within Australian
culture for people to enjoy watching high achievers fall or be ‘cut down to size’ (p. 239). The next section of this article focuses on additional contextual tensions present within the ELICOS sector.

**Economic, political, ethical and quality issues in ELICOS**

Conditions for ELICOS teachers are relatively unstable and variable and therefore pose potential barriers to teacher research. ELICOS centres can be divided into two general types: those affiliated with a university and those run as private centres. Stanley (2016, 2017) has written about the poor employment and salary conditions many ELICOS teachers face, including casual contracts being the norm, and annual salaries as low as AU$45,000 at some private centres. At a Sydney-based university-affiliated centre, the ratio of permanent to casual teachers has been reported at between 1:3 and 1:4 (Alexander, 2016). The prominence of casual contracts results from frequent fluctuations in (1) the Australian dollar, (2) international perceptions of Australian education and (3) government student visa policies, all of which affect ELICOS student enrolments (English Australia, 2015b). As a result, and in a bid to attract international students, most English language centres are necessarily business-oriented (Walker, 2011), creating a tension between business and pedagogical priorities.

Other issues in ELICOS relate to quality and ethics (Stanley, 2017). Stanley argues that ‘the sector is structurally ill-suited to simply pushing and hoping for quality’ (p. 39) in regard to teacher professional development. Her research also found that while managers expected teachers to be professional, paradoxically they perceived ELICOS teachers quite negatively. Such perceptions would act as barriers, preventing the development of a supportive environment for sustained teacher professional development and AR engagement.

**The research approach**

This study adopted a qualitative case study methodology in order to develop a rich, holistic picture (Duff, 2008) of the teachers’ experiences of the English Australia AR program and its impact on the ELICOS sector to date. The study involved three phases, which are summarised in Table 1. Across all three phases, the following research question was explored:

How do ELICOS teachers’ sociocultural professional environments facilitate or constrain their professional development during and after their engagement in the English Australia AR program?
**Table 1: Summary of the Research Phases and Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research phase</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Research methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background phase</td>
<td>16 teachers who participated in the first few years of the AR program</td>
<td>Online survey (n=16) Follow-up interviews (30 mins) (n=10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitudinal phase</td>
<td>5 teachers who participated in a recent iteration of the AR program</td>
<td>5 in-depth interviews (40–60 mins) with each teacher at these strategic points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview 1 in March (start of AR program)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview 2 in June (middle of program)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview 3 in September (after English Australia conference presentation)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview 4 in December (post-program)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview 5 in March (post-program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager phase</td>
<td>9 managers of ELICOS centres (both university centres and private centres) from which at least one teacher had participated in the AR program</td>
<td>Interviews (30 mins) with each manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher participants had on average 14 years of teaching experience (but that varied widely between 4–25 years), and 80% of the teachers had already gained or were completing a master’s or diploma in TESOL or Applied Linguistics. The majority of teachers and managers in this study worked at ELICOS centres affiliated with universities, where students would generally be on Academic English programs, while a small number of the participants worked in privately-run ELICOS centres.

The online survey asked participants to write about the main challenges they experienced during and after the AR program, and the support they benefited from. In interviews, the teachers were asked what aspects of their contexts they felt were helping or hindering their ongoing professional development. Managers were asked how teacher AR participation had affected their centre, what they thought about the role of research in ELICOS teaching, and how AR might contribute to the sector. In order to protect participants’ identities, the year of each teacher’s AR program participation and their project details are not specified. The data extracts presented in the following section are labelled with the phase of research and other relevant details such as pseudonyms and interview number (for longitudinal phase data).
Analysis of the data followed procedures for organising, coding, interpreting and validating the data suggested by Saldaña (2013). Using Saldaña’s codes-to-theory model, I created categories and then themes to address the research question. Next, following theories of tension and paradox (such as Berger et al., 2005 and Smith, Erez, Jarvenpaa, Lewis, & Tracey, 2017), I searched across the dataset for instances where one specific benefit of AR engagement contrasted directly with one of the constraining factors as perceived by the teachers and/or managers. This analysis resulted in four tensions emerging, which are presented in the next section together with possible ways forward.

**Tensions and possible directions**

**Tension 1: Reflective mindsets but no time for reflection**

Many of the teachers interviewed seemed to have developed a reflective mindset – a way of thinking about their teaching that involved systematic reflection – as promoted by the cyclical AR framework of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. However, this first tension arose because many teachers found a lack of time for reflection within their everyday teaching.

After finishing the AR program, one teacher explained he was planning his teaching and making pedagogical decisions with more of a ‘critical lens’ than before (Longitudinal phase, Quinn, Interview 4) and with a ‘frame of mind of thoughtful reflective teaching’ (Interview 5). The teachers also seemed able to sustain this reflective mindset several years after their AR participation: many continued to use the AR framework to reflect informally on teaching and learning cycles. As a result, they were able to move away from a ‘trial and error’ approach to teaching (Longitudinal phase, Phoebe, Interview 1) and towards an approach that involved systematic, structured reflection on teaching and learning cycles.

However, several teachers alluded to the reflective mindset as a ‘curse’. One teacher explained that AR was ‘almost like a curse, because from here on you can never just do something and not reflect on it’ (Longitudinal phase, Alex, Interview 3). Interestingly, this finding challenges Allwright’s (2005) claim that teachers lack time to conduct AR: it was after conducting AR that these teachers lamented a lack of time to continue reflecting. Due to the structure of the nine-month AR program, time for reflection was created within AR workshops, online discussions and sometimes through teaching relief. However, after the program, the teachers embraced their more reflective stances on teaching, but lacked the time and energy to reflect, leading to frustration. On the topic of time for reflection, Clarke (1994) made the following suggestions over two decades ago:
If teachers are to be considered reflective practitioners . . . of primary importance is the need for the time to reflect; collaborate; observe other teachers; develop personal theories, curriculum, materials, and so forth. In addition, teachers need smaller classes, more hospitable classrooms, and the resources to experiment with and change their approach to teaching. In short, the day-to-day business of teaching must become more conducive to thoughtful work. (p. 23)

The situation has generally only deteriorated since Clarke’s suggestions, due to neoliberal policies and funding crises. Indeed, in the profit-driven ELICOS sector, hoping for smaller classes and more resources is unrealistic.

**Tension 1: Possible directions**

As an initial way forward, there is potential for more structured reflective space within many ELICOS centres’ professional development programs. English Australia’s (2015a) *Guide to Best Practice in Managing Professional Development in ELICOS* includes suggestions about how to engage teachers in reflective practice. Examples include reflective teaching journals, team teaching, peer coaching, and giving teachers a key role in planning professional development programs. Another example is the professional learning program Chappell and Benson (2013) established at a private ELICOS centre. The program is driven by annual observation, reflection and discussion between each teacher and their manager to determine annual action points. It incorporates inquiry-based opportunities for reflection through peer observation activities, collaborative workshops and journal article discussion groups. Sun (2010) suggests that mid-level managers play a ‘gatekeeper role’ and that they should receive training to source funding to make professional development opportunities available for teachers, even when budgets are tight. The organisation NEAS, which provides quality assurance for the ELICOS sector and organises an annual management conference, might consider providing such training.

As a further solution, when teachers have completed the English Australia AR program, their managers could discuss with them how they plan to continue their reflective practice. Possibilities include the teacher leading a collegial discussion group to further develop ideas from their AR project, or the teacher continuing cycles of AR reflection in their classroom and then sharing the findings with colleagues. Finally, the ELICOS Standards – which simply require a centre to ‘implement a program of professional development each year’ (Australian Government, 2018) – could be updated to require systematic reflection on teaching to be explicitly incorporated in the annual professional development program in a way that can be interpreted to suit each particular centre.
Tension 2: Desire for positive recognition but more negative recognition

Another key finding was that teachers desired and benefited from recognition for their AR achievements; however, some did not receive such recognition, and others experienced negative recognition in being regarded as ‘tall poppies’.

When teachers were recognised by their managers and colleagues as local experts in their AR topic, it helped them feel a level of ‘maturity’ and confidence to contribute and collaborate in general. For some, recognition meant simply being ‘noticed’ (Background phase, Robin, Interview), perhaps through being mentioned at a staff meeting or in the institution’s newsletter. For others, it meant being offered further curriculum or project work related to their AR project:

I have been working full-time as a curriculum developer for the past year, largely as a result of some sample material I made in the AR project. The new course has been presented at two conferences for being ‘ground-breaking’.

(Background phase, Survey comment)

This positive recognition boosted the teachers’ professional self-esteem and perceptions of themselves as ELICOS professionals and leaders.

Unfortunately, though, some of the teachers experienced a significant lack of recognition, and even negative recognition. One teacher explained that ‘they [colleagues] aren’t interested [in my AR], because they perceive it as a mini PhD in a short amount of time’ (Background phase, Survey comment) – which aligns with Borg’s (2013) findings about teachers (mistakenly) viewing teacher research as traditional and scientific, rather than small-scale and personal. Another teacher reflected that any token of recognition would have been welcome: ‘a certificate, an announcement would have been nice, a $50 voucher or anything, just a symbol really’ (Longitudinal phase, Sarah, Interview 4). One teacher in particular expressed intense frustration and an increasing sense of alienation from her colleagues: ‘it’s a lot of hard work and nobody [in my centre] cares, nobody was paying attention, it was as if nothing has happened, frustrating’ (Longitudinal phase, Katie, Interview 3). Katie seemed to be suffering from tall poppy syndrome, just like the teacher (Rory) from the background phase of this research as reported in Edwards and Burns (2016b). Katie reported receiving comments from her colleagues such as ‘oh wow, how can you do all these things?’, which made her feel like an ‘extra-terrestrial’ (Longitudinal phase, Katie, Interview 4). The effect of being perceived as individually successful can therefore be alienating. One issue that both Katie and Rory experienced was that their centres did not celebrate or share their research at all, so instead they pursued their interests individually, isolating them further from their institutional contexts.

Another reason behind some teachers’ lack of (or negative) recognition may be some
managers’ perceptions about the role of research. While all of the nine managers I interviewed were enthusiastic about the English Australia AR program and its role in teacher professional development, they had doubts about the value of research generally for teaching, such as: ‘while having some research [conducted in our centre] is interesting, [it] is not our main bread’ (Manager phase, Chris, University centre). Another manager described the paradoxical perceptions of research in ELICOS: ‘we’re doers and we get practical, and research is often housed in that area of university and bigger things . . . And yet we know that best practice is informed by research’ (Manager phase, Nina, University centre). The issue here is that research and teaching are viewed as separate practices, which they are in the sense of traditional research conducted by university academics; however, the perceived theory-practice divide in education has long been seen as ‘dysfunctional’ for teachers (Clarke, 1994, p. 9).

**Tension 2: Possible directions**

There are two approaches to addressing this second tension. First, ELICOS centres need ways of recognising teachers’ AR achievements in sensitive ways that align with an Australian sense of egalitarianism and promote mutual rather than purely individual gains. Teachers’ AR findings could be shared in institutional forums based around discussion and collaboration, such as community of practice groups or meetings about collaborative curriculum improvement. Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) make the important point that too often, teachers (and institutions) focus on the affirmative findings from their AR projects, rather than embracing unexpected and even uncomfortable findings. Taking a more critical perspective might be more constructive. Teams of teachers at each centre could then pursue lines of inquiry that emerge from AR projects – but there would also need to be ‘space’ in the curricula to effect change (see Tension 4 below).

The second approach is to find ways of shifting current (negative) perceptions of research, so that teachers’ AR findings are valued as legitimate knowledge. Another way of thinking about the theory-practice divide is to view teachers as researchers of their own practice, so that teacher research may, ‘by creating its own theory, escape the blind opportunism or routinization of theory-less practice’ (van Lier, 1996, p. 25), and so that teachers’ AR project findings can become appreciated as forms of valid knowledge (Borg, 2013) for ELICOS.

A significant body of contextualised knowledge has been generated through ELICOS teacher AR, all freely accessible in Cambridge Assessment English Research Notes issues 44, 48, 53, 56, 60, 64, and 67 (http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/research-notes/), as well as numerous English Australia Journal articles. While some teachers are already presenting their AR work at local and national events organised by English
Australia and UECA (University English Centres Australia), there is still scope for more dissemination. Their AR reports could be integrated into professional development programs in reading groups, as springboards for discussion, to initiate new inquiries, or as part of AR-themed professional development days where teachers present and share knowledge gained from researching their practice.

In addition, perceptions might be shifted by greater AR engagement. Former AR program participants could collaborate with managers to establish structured AR programs within their centres – which has already happened at a Sydney-based university-affiliated centre (see Haines, 2016). AR can also be conducted more informally as part of ongoing reflection on practice, with level/class team reflections occurring every 5–10 weeks at the end of courses. Collaborative AR projects might involve teachers, managers and students, in centres where that is feasible, such as those with sufficient budgets for professional development. This approach could facilitate better understanding of each other’s practices, helping teachers and managers to understand each other’s languages (which Stanley [2017] presents as a key issue), and would also align more closely with AR’s social emancipatory roots (Rainey, 2000). Finally, English Australia could establish an AR program for managers to guide them in conducting research on their own practice and then share the outcomes for best practice in ELICOS management.

**Tension 3: Renewed commitment to teaching but commitment not rewarded**

Through their AR participation, the teachers in this study developed a sense of conscious commitment to their ELT careers and to ELICOS as a sector, as well as enhanced professional identities as leaders, researchers and community collaborators. However, professional commitment is dynamic and fragile (Moodie & Feryok, 2015), and hence could be easily damaged if not rewarded by the sector.

Some of the teachers explicitly described a pivotal moment they experienced during or after their AR engagement, such as this participant’s conscious decision to remain in teaching: ‘participating in the [AR] program reignited my fire for teaching and was kind of a watershed moment where I decided I am teacher (hear me roar!) rather than I’ll do this for a while and see what happens next’ (Background phase, Survey comment). Two of the teachers in the longitudinal phase described a feeling of maturing in their profession: in terms of ‘climbing’ up a ladder in order to ‘relax into it’ (Longitudinal phase, Alex, Interview 5), and in terms of leaving behind any doubts about their career in English language teaching: ‘this IS my real job and therefore I’ve now got to make the most of it. . . . [so] where can I go next?’ (Longitudinal phase, Phoebe, Interview 4).
Many of the political and economic conditions of ELICOS, as summarised earlier in this paper, were realised in the study’s dataset as barriers to teachers’ professional commitment. These barriers include the dominance of casual employment contracts that often do not include payment for professional development activities, the undervaluing of teacher experience and the focus on profit rather than pedagogy in some ELICOS contexts (also see Stanley, 2016, 2017). For example, one teacher noted the difficulty in maintaining institutional motivation for AR when teachers are transient: ‘I don’t know once we left if there would have been as much drive to put it [AR-based curricular changes] through, because you usually need a champion with these types of initiatives to keep them going’ (Background phase, Interview). Another teacher described how she felt her commitment to developing innovative materials through her AR project was ignored because ‘my Director of Studies said my centre was about profit and money’ (Longitudinal phase, Katie, Interview 2) – and these comments echo those about the lack of recognition as described in Tension 2. The danger is that if teachers’ renewed sense of professionalism and commitment is not rewarded in some way by their centre or the sector, they may become disengaged and burnt-out or alienated, and consider leaving the profession.

**Tension 3: Possible directions**

ELICOS conditions are unlikely to change in the near future, and in centres where profit is the focus, budgets are tight and there is little space to consider innovations in teacher professional development, investing time (and any money available) in teacher research may not be feasible. However, all ELICOS centres are required to implement an annual program of professional development (Australian Government, 2018), so where there are managers and teachers interested in innovations (such as in the ELICOS centre described in Chappell & Benson, 2013), then there are opportunities. Managers also need to be convinced of the impact of teacher research on student learning, and ultimately on profit; however, research exploring these relationships is scant, especially in ELT. In the field of general education, Hattie’s (2012) large-scale meta-analysis shows that inquiry-based teaching (such as an AR approach) has a statistically significant effect on promoting meaningful student learning, and similar studies in ELT would be welcome.

Managers can still work within existing limitations to ensure teachers feel rewarded for their professionalism and commitment. If possible, casual teachers should be paid for participation in professional development activities (Sun, 2010), but equally given autonomy and responsibility both in determining topics and approaches to bottom-up professional development (Wyatt & Ončevska Ager, 2016), and within materials development projects (see ‘possible directions’ for Tension 4). These conditions for casual teachers could be incorporated within the ELICOS Standards.
Since there are limited career progression pathways for committed teachers generally, beyond moving into management, the ELICOS Standards and/or individual ELICOS centres could conceptualise their own frameworks for teacher leadership (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). Teacher leadership activities could include mentoring others, leading discussion groups and professional development sessions, running a centre-based AR program (see Haines, 2016) or even setting up a local journal to disseminate teachers’ findings. These activities could have promotions and small pay increases attached to them, and be set out in a framework that explicitly encourages teacher career progression. All of these suggestions promote a balance between bottom-up teacher initiative and top-down support from managers, since such a balance is necessary for a system (i.e., an ELICOS centre) to create an environment conducive to sustainable teacher development (Edwards & Burns, 2016a).

Tension 4: Opportunities for AR materials integration but inflexible curricula
One of the original purposes of teachers conducting research was to inform curriculum development. Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of space and flexibility in some ELICOS curricula which prevents teachers from integrating their AR materials in some contexts.

Teachers using their research-based knowledge to design and improve curricula is arguably ‘the core of a proper understanding of teacher professionalism’ (Hammersley, 2004, p. 166). Many of the ELICOS teachers in the current study expressed a desire for their AR findings, activities and materials to be integrated into the curriculum at their centre, but only a few succeeded: ‘If I listen to everyone else [the other AR participants], they have had problems with curricula that they can’t change. [For me] it’s just been a breeze, it’s been absolutely fantastic’ (Longitudinal phase, Alex, Interview 3). Alex was empowered as a curriculum developer, and she benefited from a new position that was created for her to integrate her materials into the centre’s curriculum. However, in many cases such curricular integration was difficult. Several teachers cited a lack of space and flexibility in their centre curricula. Another reason was the transience of ELICOS teachers as a result of casual contracts: ‘[Improving the syllabus] was my goal but I left so I didn’t see what happened in the end’ (Background study, Survey comment).

Tension 4: Possible directions
To navigate this tension, managers could create paid or unpaid short-term positions for AR participants to formally integrate their AR findings into the centre’s materials or curriculum. Many ELICOS centres would argue that their curricula, especially Academic English curricula, need to be rigid and standardised in order to maintain quality in a context where teacher transience is high. However, perhaps a few hours
of flexible space per week could be added into such curricula to allow for teachers to trial, reflect on and continuously adapt innovative materials from their own or relevant ELICOS AR projects. If this approach is not possible, teachers could develop supplementary teaching resources from their AR projects to be used as homework, extension or self-study resources (as occurred in Yuan and Lee’s 2015 study).

Another approach, as mentioned by several of the managers interviewed, could be to ensure that teachers’ AR projects focus on a topic that aligns with the centre’s priorities before commencing the AR program. One manager explained that ‘I think the AR has to be really pertinent to the centre, and the centre has to be able to take up on the outcomes’ (Manager phase, Charlie, University centre). In negotiating such alignment, it is important to find space to accommodate both the teacher’s interests and the centre’s needs. English Australia could also play a role in systematically canvassing managers’ perceptions more generally on topics that would be relevant for future years of the AR program.

Conclusions

The benefits of the English Australia AR program for teacher development reported in this paper include reflective mindsets, increased professional confidence (if teachers’ expertise is recognised), a renewed commitment to teaching, and the ability to innovate curricula. The teachers who participated in the AR program were all highly motivated since they volunteered their participation, and yet the systematic and collaborative process of conducting AR and producing tangible tools (such as new classroom materials) facilitated development in ways teachers would be unlikely to achieve alone, without such a framework. For exploration of how such development is attributable to AR, please see Edwards (in press, 2018).

The important influence of certain tensions on the teachers’ development is also clearly evidenced, despite the study involving a relatively small selection (n=21) of teachers who have participated in the English Australia AR program to date (n=90). Under conducive workplace conditions, teachers are supported, recognised, and empowered as knowledge-creators after engaging in the AR program. However, the dataset indicates quite a few ‘lost’ opportunities for some of the teachers and centres involved, so there is scope for navigating the tensions by implementing the suggestions made throughout this paper. The study contributes to the literature on tensions in AR by highlighting the importance of specific cultural and economic influences on teacher development.

An interesting question raised by one of the managers was whether private English language centres, which are not connected to universities nor preparing students for
academic study, actually need to be doing research, and whether staff and students would benefit from research engagement. If the focus of an ELICOS centre is purely on ‘profit and money’, as alluded to by one teacher in this study, then teacher research engagement may well not be successful or even feasible in that centre. Nevertheless, the English Australia AR program is and will remain entirely voluntary – so it is up to individual ELICOS teachers to decide if it would suit their professional development needs at any point in their careers, provided they are able to obtain support from their manager to participate.

There is also a need, though, for a more systemic shift in perceptions about research. If we are to view teachers as agentive professionals (Hammersley, 2004) and truly value teachers as being central to professional knowledge development (Borg, 2013; Clarke, 1994), then there is a need to view theory and practice as fully integrated rather than as separate domains. Whether this view can become widespread in ELICOS and ELT remains to be seen. Maybe research is contrary to the culture of some ELT institutions, which Berger et al. (2005) believe to be the case in US primary schools. Perhaps only a complete systemic change would enhance the status of English language teachers, as Clarke (1994) and Stanley (2017) suggest. Or perhaps as more and more English language teachers – and ideally also managers and students – engage in AR and other forms of inquiry-based practice, thereby contributing to their own contextual knowledge base, perceptions may slowly shift.

References


Emily Edwards has worked as an English language teacher, coordinator and course designer in Australia and overseas. In 2012 she took part in the English Australia Action Research in ELICOS program, and was inspired to explore the impact of the program through her PhD research. She is now a Lecturer at the University of Technology and a Visiting Fellow at the University of New South Wales, both in Sydney, Australia.

emily.edwards-1@uts.edu.au
The Rejection Project: An action research project encouraging student interaction outside the classroom

SARAH WILSON
Monash University English Language Centre

International students are increasingly isolated and disconnected when they attend university and may fear talking to the English-speaking public. The Rejection Project is an action research project that examines a new classroom method for university EAP [English for Academic Purposes] teachers to actively encourage students to overcome their fears and speak to local English speakers. This may increase their interactions with the Australian public and give them a better student experience.

Background

This project began with a chance meeting with a Chinese ex-student I had in one of my EAP classes who is now studying at university. She told me that she had seen a Brazilian classmate from our EAP class at the bus stop but did not approach him because she was worried about speaking English to him. I concluded that if this reasonably confident woman felt uncomfortable talking to a previous classmate who was also learning English then it was unlikely she was speaking to local English speakers. After this conversation I asked my EAP students (all Chinese) at Monash University English Language Centre if they speak to Australians and when they said they did not, I asked them why. Several said they were shy, but then, with more persistent questions they concluded that they were afraid. They feared that they would be rejected by English speakers, either because their English was insufficient or because local speakers would not understand them or be interested in them. Most of them did not even try to interact with local speakers unless in a situation where they had no choice, such as talking with student services to obtain an identification card. These Chinese EAP students were using Chinese outside of class to buy their groceries, interact with friends and housemates, and throughout their lives in Australia.

International student integration has been difficult for many Australian universities (Baik, Naylor, & Arkoudis, 2015). Lawson (2012) showed that international students
want to be more involved with local speakers and the university community but an international student survey (Baik et al., 2015) revealed most students (56%) do not make Australian friends, 30% do not feel part of the university community and increasingly students are ‘keeping to themselves’ (44% up from 28%). Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia (2008) add that same-culture interactions are important for international students but to avoid loneliness and isolation they must have connections with local English speakers. Thus it is essential for universities to implement programs that help international and local students to integrate.

Several universities have tried various programs to help students integrate (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2017). For example, Monash University created English Connect, a free program that involves local students and aims to help students with academic and social English to build cultural understanding and friendships. Other universities have programs that involve volunteers or paid local students guiding international students on tours or events. These programs may attract many students but given the current levels of loneliness and isolation, they do not appear to help all students overcome their lack of connection to the university and make friends. Assisting students in overcoming their fears may be a key addition to these programs to help integrate students.

Findings from studies conducted in Australian contexts (see below) suggest there are several different reasons international students have difficulty integrating into the community: lack of agency, a perceived or real lack of proficiency, and few opportunities to interact with local English speakers. Although there are other aspects at play, these reasons will be the focus of this paper.

A common reason for international students not interacting with local English speakers is the lack of human agency. Individuals who have agency recognise that they are in control of their own thoughts, motivations and behaviour and thus direct their lives. EAP students who have agency see their education as their responsibility and will take action to interact with others. Individuals who exercise agency usually find it easier to interact with others and make friends (Sawir et al., 2008). Sawir et al. (2008) believe that people may not approach others because, among other reasons, they have a ‘fear of rejection’. Yang, Noels and Saumure (2006) also argue that students need to have low anxiety when speaking English and a high perception of their language skills. Perhaps Australian international students have a low perception of their English and thus low self-confidence leading to a reluctance to talk to local speakers.

English proficiency, or perceived lack of proficiency is another reason students are reluctant to interact with local speakers of English. Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett,
Nyland and Ramia (2012) believe that individuals proficient in English are also likely to show human agency. They explain that students who feel their English is insufficient do not use their English outside the classroom when, clearly, this is the best way to improve their skills. In other words, students may be waiting for their English to improve to a level where they feel comfortable practicing their English with locals, not realising that speaking to locals is the best way to improve their English. However, these authors add that given the right educational environment, even students with low proficiency can succeed.

Some authors have argued that students do not have opportunities to integrate with local speakers of English or are constrained by time or the locations of their daily lives. Benson, Chappell and Yates (2018) studied an EAP student who showed great agency in the way she chose to integrate English into her daily life. As the student explains: ‘Sometimes you feel afraid to talk with local people because they can’t understand you.’ Yet this student’s determination to learn English helped her overcome this fear as she demonstrated her willingness to initiate interactions with local English speakers in various contexts. However, students may not feel there are adequate opportunities if EAP classes only consist of students from one culture, if work and study occupies most of their time, and if they feel afraid to initiate conversations.

Strategies to communicate with local English speakers are rarely offered to students within the EAP classroom. Integration strategies are mainly described as inner classroom integration rather than methods that encourage students to pursue interactions beyond the classroom. Saglamel and Kayaoglu (2013) introduced drama lessons to help students overcome language anxiety. This showed that students had lower levels of language anxiety, but how these drama lessons would help students integrate was not explored. The Rejection Project appears to be the first time that a documented strategy has been taught to students to specifically improve student reluctance to interact with local English speakers.

The Rejection Project is an action research project based on ‘rejection therapy’ which was created by an entrepreneur, Jason Comely to overcome his fear of rejection (Jiang, 2015a). It is a 30-day challenge where individuals approach strangers every day and make requests they believe will be rejected. This is designed to desensitise participants from rejection so they are able to pitch their business ideas to investors, partners or clients. Jia Jiang made rejection therapy famous through his TED talks, book and viral YouTube video (Jiang, 2015b). Participants of rejection therapy report that in making requests to strangers, they no longer feel fearful and gain a new confidence in approaching others (Jiang, 2015a).

This practice of desensitisation, has been thoroughly researched and practiced in
clinical psychology for many decades (Graham & Reynolds, 2013). Desensitisation is a common tool used by psychologists, particularly cognitive behavioural therapists, to treat fears, phobias or anxiety through exposing the patient to their fear in a number of stages. It is an intervention that has strong evidence of treating patients who suffer from fears or behaviours they wish to eliminate from a range of conditions such as autism, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety disorders. It is considered a vital aspect of cognitive behavioural therapy and has a large body of evidence supporting it as a best practice treatment for a variety of mental health issues (Graham & Reynolds, 2013).

Originally developed by Wolpe (1958), systematic desensitisation allows psychologists to help patients overcome a fear through a series of small steps of exposure. For example, Bandura (1977) famously helped individuals overcome a fear of snakes. They begin by looking at pictures of snakes and then touching the pictures. After they feel calm, they watch a snake on a video. Once comfortable with this, they look at live snakes through a window and then finally touch a real snake. Once they achieve this final step, their fear is likely to have disappeared. A behavioural therapist or psychologist is with the individual through all of the steps monitoring their fear and sometimes using calming techniques to help the client.

Bandura also took desensitisation further and found that helping patients overcome their fears leads to them developing confidence in other areas of their lives. In examining Bandura, I was inspired to look at his other theories and found ‘social cognitive theory’ whereby a person watching someone else overcome their fears feels inspired to overcome their own fears (Bandura, 1971). Learning about social modelling from Bandura inspired me to participate in this action research project. If students could see that their teacher is participating then, according to the ‘social modelling theory’, they would be even more willing to face their own fears of rejection.

**Action**

Inspired by Jia Jiang and Bandura, I applied for and received an internal Monash College grant and created an action research project which I called ‘The Rejection Project’. Action Research is a process conducted by classroom teachers to solve a particular classroom difficulty. It is often described as a circular process where a teacher identifies a specific problem in their class, researches the issue, devises a strategy and then implements the strategy in the classroom. Often the process does not end at this point, rather the teacher gathers feedback and observations from the intervention, reflects and researches the intervention further, then modifies the strategy and tries again (Burns, 2009).
The first class
The first time I did this action research project was with my class of 18 students from Monash University English Language Centre (MUELC) studying Monash English Bridging for University. These students were all Chinese, taking a 20-week EAP course. Two students were aiming for undergraduate study, one in Arts and one in Business, while the remaining 16 were aiming for postgraduate study in Media and Communication, or Business. There were 12 females and 6 males. Students entered the class with an overall minimum IELTS score of 5.5 with no band score lower than a 5.0 in Reading, Writing, Speaking or Listening.

Before the project began, the first class learned about the theories behind the Rejection Project. I believed that students would need to learn about desensitisation and be persuaded to participate in the project, so this was introduced as a listening task with a TED talk by David Kelley (2012), who explains the steps of overcoming a fear and how this can help individuals express creativity. Then I showed them Jiang’s What I Learned from 100 Days of Rejection (Jiang, 2015b) and the Rejection Project was revealed. Students had a series of lessons and class activities to help them through the challenges set by the project.

Students were issued a challenge to speak to local English speakers for 2 weeks. Every day in the first week students spoke to locals with simple, easily accepted requests such as asking for directions and then students were challenged to make requests they believed would be rejected, for example, asking a stranger for $50 or asking to swap hats. Unlike Jiang’s (2015a) challenge, where he only approaches strangers, the students were permitted to make requests to any English speaker who was unaware of the project.

In class, the rules of the Rejection Project were designed to help students have positive experiences and avoid potential difficulties. For example, students knew not to approach children and that they could not ask someone to do something illegal or unethical. They could also do what I called a ‘tag-on’. This is where they can add their request at the end of an interaction with someone they are already conversing with. For example, if a student is at a coffee shop, they order their coffee and then ask if they can have a cookie for free. This is less intimidating since they have already engaged the local speaker in a conversation and do not have to approach with a rejection request.

During the project the students had class lessons to prepare them for any social or English language problems that may have occurred in their interactions, and they were given guidelines on how the project works. Firstly, they learned how to choose and approach a ‘target’, and we revised language for making requests and appropriate
body language. Secondly, I met pairs of students at the campus centre where they watched me ask a stranger for a simple request and then I observed each of them carry one out. A couple of times students were ignored or misunderstood. To help overcome this, students were encouraged to keep trying interactions until they succeeded. Thirdly, students were also taught how to avoid dangerous situations, and they were encouraged to participate in the project in pairs so they had someone to support them and intervene if necessary. This was practiced using roleplays.

Finally, there were lessons to help students understand why people reject requests and how to accept rejection in a healthy manner. As this was an action research project, I often shared my ideas with the Monash College student psychologist, Mai Tham. She encouraged me to teach the students how to handle rejection. Some people do not know how to manage their feelings about rejection or may have experienced abuse or trauma from rejection in the past. In class, students were given stories about rejection – some famous ones where people have persisted in the face of rejection; others taken from people I know (shared anonymously and with consent). In class, the students divided the stories into positive and negative reactions to rejection and then discussed possible ways they could react to rejection.

I also participated in the action research project, keeping a diary of interactions and my own challenges which I shared with the class. With the first class I wanted to demonstrate that I was also willing to confront people with difficult requests and I did this by approaching our CEO Jo Mithen with a request to interview her and showed my students the video when the interview was complete.

After the lessons were completed the students each gave an oral presentation about their experiences and we celebrated the end of the project with a ‘rejection party’. After this, the students completed a Survey Monkey survey (Appendix A) and some were interviewed to gain qualitative data.

**Observations (first class)**

The first time I considered this project, I simply wanted to see students take more risks and in doing so, gain resilience and confidence in their English skills. I thought that this action research project would lead students to being more willing to try new ways of learning and to gain more confidence by confronting their fears of rejection. However, during the reflection and research part of my action research it became clear to me that this project should focus on increasing student interactions with the public. Thus, after the first class was involved in the project, and upon learning more about the loneliness and isolation students face, I narrowed my focus of my action research project to increasing student interactions with local English speakers.
Written consent to participate in the project and be filmed for the oral presentations was obtained from all the students, except one from this first class. I thought consent was going to be difficult. One student asked during class whether they had to participate. I restated the possible benefits of the project and explained that participation was their choice. I believe he wanted to choose and not be forced to participate because of a class requirement. Interestingly, he became one of the most outspoken advocates of the project and its benefits. The one student who did not participate explained in private that she believed the project would ‘change her personality’. She still wanted to participate in the lessons so I included her and invited her to join in the challenges when she felt more comfortable. At the end when the other students presented their experiences she also addressed the class and congratulated everyone on completing the project and expressed regret in not participating.

When the students began this project a few students decided to skip the simple, acceptable requests and move onto the rejection stage. This caused one of them to lose confidence quickly and gain more fear because he did not want to repeat the experience. This was difficult to manage but eventually I convinced the student to make a few easily accepted requests and build his confidence before trying the rejection stage again.

Whilst the data confirmed the positive benefits of the project, I wondered if the students had increased their confidence or simply believed the project increased their confidence. They loved the project so they wanted to express good outcomes, however this does not mean that the intervention worked. After consulting with the MUELCA psychologist, I decided to adjust the survey so that several of the same questions were asked before and after the project to show any changes in attitude. In future, another student survey will use these same questions to measure and compare the class’s attitudes and behaviours with other classes who did not participate in the project. It is hoped that this data will show that students that participate in the project are still interacting with English speakers more than students who did not participate.

The second class

The second MUELCA class was also a 20-week EAP class of 18 Chinese students. All six males and 11 of the 12 females were aiming to enter postgraduate Business courses, with one female heading for an undergraduate program.

Three weeks into the EAP course is a good time to start as the students have built rapport with each other and with the teacher. It is also early enough that it does not interfere with assessment and gives the students time to explore talking to locals throughout the course with the support of the teacher. Unfortunately for the second
class, I was ill with the flu and injuries so the students had several different teachers and I had little time to build rapport before the project started in Week 6. This may explain why the second class did not appear to be as enthusiastic as the first class, and although we had a solid relationship, I did not feel the same connection with this class as the first class.

Based on my observations and reflection of the project from the first class I decided to include a pre-project questionnaire to gauge the students’ attitudes towards talking to local English speakers (see Appendix B). This questionnaire was a series of statements where students could agree, be neutral, or disagree. Included was the statement: ‘I only want friends from my own country’. When the students completed the survey and I saw that 100% of the students disagreed with this statement, I decided to display and discuss this result with the class. From this I asked the students if any of them had made friends and when they told me they rarely spoke English outside the classroom, I used this information to start a discussion about local English speakers and introduce the project.

For the second class, I decided I would reveal the second part of the Rejection Project after the students had completed the first week instead of revealing the entire project from the beginning. I did this because some students from the first class moved to the second stage of the project without completing a week of simple requests first, which I felt resulted in a loss of confidence. This time I divided the project into two clear stages. I gave them one week of using easily accepted requests before presenting the second stage.

I decided to cut the first TED talk on How to Build Your Creative Confidence (Kelley, 2012). Whilst this did demonstrate desensitisation, it included difficult vocabulary and concepts. In addition, the first group of students did not appear to benefit from it, so this activity was eliminated for the second class.

The other class lessons and consultations remained mostly the same and, like the first class, the students readily participated and each gave an oral presentation about their experiences. Written consent was obtained from all the students and no one from the second class refused to participate. I participated in the same challenges as the students, but this time I did not do the more challenging request, where I had previously requested an interview from the CEO of the college.

**Student feedback from surveys, interviews and diaries (second class)**

In the first class a survey was given after the project (see Appendix A) and qualitative results were also obtained through interviews and diary entries. The second class also had a survey. As mentioned above, it was administered before (see Appendix B) and after (see Appendix C) the intervention, in order to investigate changes in
attitude. These students were also interviewed and oral presentations at the end of the project were considered.

This project showed a number of improvements in different areas. Firstly, the students said that the project improved their confidence and helped them overcome any fears in talking to strangers (i.e., their sense of agency). Secondly the students reported that their English communication skills had improved. Lastly, the students said that the project gave them more opportunities to interact with local students.

Findings
Agency

One of the students said, ‘There’s a cute girl in Class DD. If I ask her out and she says “No” then I have fulfilled the day’s request. If she says “Yes” then I get to go on a date with the cute girl from Class DD.’ After confirming this was correct and explaining the concept of a ‘win-win’ situation, he said, ‘I’m in!’

This humorous exchange demonstrates the main advantages of the project: increasing agency. Through the project, students see failure as the goal – the winning outcome. They have never viewed failure or rejection as a necessary step to achieving success before. As it turns out, the cute girl from Class DD did agree to date my student and whilst they ultimately decided not to continue dating, he explained that he never would have pursued ‘a girl like her’ before the project and in future he would continue to ask girls out, even if he believed they were ‘too good’ for him.

This agency may be derived from building on that first positive interaction with a local English speaker and feeling empowered by that experience. This is shown by 94% of students from the first class reporting that the project improved their confidence, for example: ‘I have the courage to ask from a stranger – before I did this project I cannot imagine I could do that, but now realise it is not difficult.’

When involved in any desensitisation process the first few steps are the hardest, as often the fear of interaction is far greater than the reality of speaking with local English speakers. Jiang (2015a) discusses how he experienced physical signs of fear when he first approached his first stranger with a rejection request, but then explains how this fear response decreases with each subsequent interaction. This is why it is important to show students an interaction and be there when they have their first one.

The question of whether students take rejection personally also demonstrates agency. In the survey of the first class, 60% of the students said they took rejection less personally after the project. Before the project, 39% of students in the second class disagreed with ‘I don’t take rejection personally’, but afterwards 29% disagreed. When students take rejection less personally it means they are more likely to try another interaction with another local English speaker. Although this is not a huge
change, the duration of the project was only seven days. I would expect this to increase if the project were increased to 30 days. Also, my students appeared to have little experience in rejection before the project and may have overestimated their ability to take rejection personally in the initial survey.

One of the best indicators of the project were the statements about approaching strangers. The first class said they believed the project ‘made it easier for them to approach strangers’ (87% agreed or strongly agreed). In the second class, 33% agreed with the statement ‘It is not easy for me to approach strangers’ before the project and 12% afterwards. Twenty eight percent disagreed with this statement before the project and this increased to 47% afterwards. Similarly, before the project, 67% of students agreed with the statement ‘I feel comfortable expressing my ideas, feelings and concerns.’ This increased by 10 percentage points afterwards. These results indicate that desensitisation does have a positive impact. Clearly, the more students talk to the people in the community, the more they feel comfortable approaching people and expressing themselves, and realise their fear of talking to local speakers is unfounded.

**Communication, proficiency and perceived proficiency**

All the students found that the project helped their communication skills and 86% from the first class found it ‘easier to talk to strangers after the project’. For example: ‘At the beginning I could not speak fluently . . . but one day I talked to a stranger for a long time without any “ums” and I realised I had improved my speaking.’ Another student said: ‘What a great way to learn English, I am actually communicating!’

In terms of perceived proficiency, the results were also positive. From the second class, 55% of the students agreed with the statement that ‘My English is not good enough to have a conversation with an Australian’ (33% neutral) before the project. But after the project most of the students disagreed with this statement (47%) or were neutral (18%). This indicates that the project helped students discover that their English is sufficient for a conversation with a local. By speaking to locals, students can realise that their English proficiency is sufficient to sustain a conversation. This may encourage more conversations with the realisation that their English is not as weak as they imagined. With more conversations the students improved their communication skills, communicated better, thus leading to further confidence to pursue more conversations.

The project also revealed authentic perspectives that students are rarely exposed to in the classroom. For example, one student explained how he was discussing house prices with an Uber driver and the Uber driver talked about how ‘rich Chinese’ are ‘driving up house prices’. This was a surprising benefit to the project. These kinds of
perspectives lead to a broader and richer education for EAP students.

Opportunities to interact

The Rejection Project required EAP students to create their own opportunities to interact with local English speakers. My students were excited to learn how to speak to locals and create their own opportunities to speak with them in English. One student told me: ‘we would do the project as we would “hang out” together. One of us would just say, “Rejection Project” and take a friend away from the group to go and talk to an Australian before joining the group again.’

Whilst I worried that the students would have negative experiences, particularly when asking difficult questions that are likely to be rejected, many reported having some memorable exchanges. One student explained that she asked a man flying a kite if he could let her have a turn with the kite. This turned into a 30 minute interaction where she practiced her English but also learned a difficult skill. She expressed joy when she was finally flying the kite on her own.

For the item: ‘Australians are generally helpful and friendly’, 72% of students from the second class agreed before the project (the rest were neutral) but by the end of the project 82% of them agreed and the rest were neutral. This shows that the students were generally having positive experiences with their community and that local English speakers are more helpful and friendly than they expected. Many of them were surprised at how often their requests were accepted. For example, one student who was on the last bus of the night asked the bus driver if he could change the route slightly to drive past her street. He initially said no, but after everyone else had left the bus he agreed and took her directly to her street. It is important that students see local English speakers as helpful and friendly because then they are more likely to seek help when they need it and not be afraid of a negative reaction.

The project also encouraged better socialisation: several students had engaging conversations and even built friendships. For example, one student said, ‘I am glad to invite her to go to the city. We left our phone numbers and became friends.’ This is the best outcome of the project, as developing friendships is key to diminishing loneliness and isolation. Sawir et al. (2008, p. 159) discovered that ‘65% of students who had experienced loneliness or isolation had faced barriers in making friends across cultures compared to 36% of the non-lonely.’ So perhaps in teaching students how to interact with local English speakers they are overcoming these struggles and finally able to build friendships.

Limitations

There are many gaps in this action research project that will need to be investigated
further. This project needs to be implemented with various classes and teachers to learn more about the strategy and its effectiveness. The results are based on student surveys, interviews and classes from one teacher in one institution. A better picture will emerge once different teachers, students and institutions participate.

I participated in the project because I believed that students needed a model. This appears to have had a positive impact on the students’ own motivations to participate in the project. Further projects could involve classes where the teacher does not participate to measure if this make any difference.

Further research could measure confidence, risk-taking, resilience, communication skills and willingness to communicate and lower levels of language anxiety, rather than simply obtaining student opinions in these areas. Even the idea that students are fearful of rejection is rarely discussed in the literature and mostly comes from my own interviews and conversations with students.

The first and second class mentioned that they wanted the duration of the project to be the same as rejection therapy. I decided not to do this because of constraints in the curriculum, however, a few EAP students decided to extend it for 30 days. After seeing the benefits from these students, I believe that 30 days of the second stage will elicit better results so future classes will be trialled over 30 days.

It has been over a year since my first group of students has entered the university to study their chosen courses. Sometimes a few of them contact me to tell me how they still make an effort to initiate conversations. One student gave me an example of how she used her skills from the Rejection Project in her Media and Communication postgraduate course. An assignment required her to produce a video of a news story consisting of an introduction, filming of an event and an interview with an event organiser. She chose an event and contacted the event organiser who agreed to be interviewed. However, when the organiser realised she was going to be filmed she changed her mind. My student persisted and explained to the organiser that the film was a university assignment and would only be seen by the lecturer marking it. With this new information the event organiser did consent to be filmed for the interview. Being able to initiate conversations and persist in the face of rejection is a skill often required in personal and professional life, especially for those studying to be a journalist.

My next step is to survey and interview the previous groups of students who are attending the university to see if students continue to talk to local speakers and whether they are integrating into the university community. This will be tested against a control group.
This project only targets EAP students because we have the opportunity to implement the program during EAP classes. It would perhaps be useful to consider how to deliver a similar project for international students who do not attend EAP classes to encourage them to interact with locals.

Discussion

Students wanting to communicate with local speakers of English will likely have to create their own opportunities. This can be done in a variety of ways as evidenced by the student described in Benson, Chappell and Yates (2018), but can also be achieved through the Rejection Project. I believe for true integration at universities several strategies need to be simultaneously implemented. The human need to connect with people in the local community applies to both international and local students. Offering more opportunities and encouraging local students to interact more with international students will need to be encouraged by universities. A university culture where local English speakers and international students regularly have interactions with each other should be an important goal. I invite universities to become involved in helping international students integrate into the university community and encourage local students to talk more with international students. The Rejection Project is a first step where EAP students initiating conversations will hopefully inspire local students to integrate more with international students.

It is important to implement integration strategies – international student voices need to be heard and considered, or universities may find international students leaving Australia when they are not gaining the experience they are seeking (Larmer, 2017). For example, one student in Sawir et al. (2008, p. 162) said: ‘If I knew that I would be so isolated, maybe I would not have come’.

University classrooms and tutorials would also benefit from better integration. If international students feel more confident to express themselves then their views and ideas will be better represented in the university classroom. If students are afraid of rejection they are more likely to be silent and opportunities for sharing new perspectives are lost. All students, local and international, would benefit from international students having the courage and skills to express themselves.

Conclusion

International students come to Australia at great expense and effort to have an authentic Australian experience and to enrich their education, careers and lives (Wall & Tran, 2016). Currently, they are lonely, isolated and fearful of local English speakers. Clearly, integration is not being optimised in Australian universities. In an EAP setting it is possible to teach and challenge students to initiate interactions with
local English speakers and this may increase their agency, communication skills and social skills. EAP educators can empower students and guide them to take control and responsibility for their own interactions with local English speakers. The Rejection Project gives EAP students the power to initiate friendships and have the social and academic discussions they want to have. It puts the power of communication back where it belongs: with the students.

References


**Sarah Wilson** has been an ELICOS teacher for 4.5 years at Monash College and previously taught English at various secondary schools. Her action research on the Rejection Project was the winner of the Monash College Engaging Students Award in 2017. She has researched and delivered professional development sessions on teacher self-disclosure and learning journeys, listening, and teaching discussion through video modelling. Sarah is passionate about helping students engage more with their local communities.

sarah.wilson@monashcollege.edu.au
APPENDIX A
FIRST CLASS SURVEY (POST-REJECTION PROJECT)

1. I have learned not to take rejection personally.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - It made no difference
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Not sure

2. I talk to strangers in English more frequently after the project.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - It made no difference
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Not sure

3. It is easier for me to approach strangers after this project.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - It made no difference
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Not sure

4. After being in this project I feel that strangers are not likely to help me if I need help.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - It made no difference
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Not sure

5. After this project I feel that Australians are generally helpful and friendly.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
6. I feel that my English is not good enough to sustain a conversation with an Australian
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - It made no difference
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   - Not sure
7. Should the Rejection Project be included in all Monash College English courses? Why?/Why not?
   ............................................................................................................................
8. The best thing I learned from the project was______________________________.
9. The project could be improved by ________________________________.
10. Any further comments?

APPENDIX B
SECOND CLASS SURVEY (PRE-REJECTION PROJECT)

1. I don’t take rejection personally.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

2. I frequently talk to strangers in English.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

3. It is not easy for me to approach strangers.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

4. Australians are generally helpful and friendly.
5. My English is not good enough to have a conversation with an Australian.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

6. I only want to have friends who are from my own country.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

7. I generally keep to myself.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

8. I feel comfortable expressing my ideas, feelings and concerns.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

9. Overall, I am satisfied with my university experience so far.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

APPENDIX C
SECOND CLASS SURVEY (POST-REJECTION PROJECT)

1. I don’t take rejection personally.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

2. I frequently talk to strangers in English.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
3. It is not easy for me to approach strangers.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

4. Australians are generally helpful and friendly.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

5. My English is not good enough to have a conversation with an Australian.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

6. I generally keep to myself.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

7. I feel comfortable expressing my ideas, feelings and concerns.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

8. After this project I feel more confident.
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

9. The Rejection Project is good because __________________.

10. The Rejection Project could be improved by _______________.

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The vexed issue of written corrective feedback: English language teachers using theory to improve practice

Margaret Kettle
Queensland University Of Technology

Bronwyn Watson

Daniel Murphy

This paper focuses on written corrective feedback and its challenges for teachers working with adult learners in the English language classroom. The teachers introduced in this paper teach in dedicated language centres, specifically a private college specialising in journalism courses and a university English language centre. Both teachers teach academic preparation courses with a particular focus on writing. They each recognise that academic writing in a second language is new for their students and that the students value feedback on their written drafts. However, for the two teachers, written corrective feedback remains a vexed issue because of their own acknowledged unfamiliarity with the principles of best practice. This paper highlights their concerns and presents points from the field of second language written corrective feedback that have helped inform and improve their feedback. It is envisaged that sharing the teachers’ experiences and the relationship between theory and practice can assist other English language teachers seeking to improve their feedback on students’ second language (L2) writing.

Introduction
Feedback is an integral part of classroom teaching and currently attracting widespread interest in educational settings. Influential educator John Hattie (2009), working mainly in the Australian schooling sector, argues that feedback is ‘the most powerful single influence on enhancing achievement’ (p. 12). In second language teaching and learning, feedback – especially corrective feedback – is attracting considerable attention because of its significance for second language acquisition and learning.
Second language (L2) educator Penny Ur (1996) has argued that feedback promotes L2 improvement through the learner being informed about her/his performance by the teacher. Other researchers assert that feedback provides valuable correction and constructive input for learners (e.g., Couper, 2013; Khajavi, 2012). In addition, it offers communicative opportunities with peers (Ren & Hu, 2012) and can contribute to improved outcomes in L2 assessment (e.g., Edwards, 2013). Feedback then is a powerful agent in L2 learning. In this paper we introduce two English language teachers and their concerns about feedback, specifically written corrective feedback. We are persuaded by Hedge (2000) who argues that the correction of student errors is a complex element of classroom discourse which requires care and discretion on the part of teachers. For the teachers in this paper the importance of feedback was undisputed; the problem for them was their own capacity to deliver effective feedback that promoted uptake of correct linguistic forms and overall improvement in their students’ L2 writing.

The paper introduces the teachers and their teaching contexts. It presents the teachers’ initial concerns about written corrective feedback and the subsequent ways that they used theories and empirical findings from studies of L2 corrective feedback to inform and improve their practices. Both teachers were enrolled in a master’s degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and had several years of teaching experience. The aim of the paper is to share their experiences with other teachers for the purpose of providing knowledge and assistance in what is a recognised area of challenge. It also aims to highlight the benefits of linking theory and practice, and the opportunities for new learning when engaging with research in the field.

The teachers and their concerns about feedback

Bronwyn

Teacher written corrective feedback is an extremely vexing issue for me when teaching a course titled Feature Writing to tertiary-level, domestic and international students. Like many teachers, I often ask myself questions concerning how best to respond to the students’ writing: How effective is my feedback? What are the best strategies for delivering it? How much feedback should I provide on students’ writing?

Feature Writing is a 10-week undergraduate course at a large, private college in an Australian city. The aim of the subject is for each student to write a 1000-word feature article, which is then published in the college’s magazine City Life. The writing classes consist mainly of domestic students, but about 10 per cent are international students from non-English speaking backgrounds including countries such as Japan, Sweden, Italy, Vietnam and China.
In teaching this course, I feel there are constraints which impact on my approach. Firstly, as all the students are studying a Diploma of Journalism, I assume, rightly or wrongly, a reasonable level of proficiency in written English, which often is not the case. There is also pressure, in the limited time of tutorials of two hours a week, to make sure the quality of the feature articles published in *City Life* are exemplary because the magazine is used as a promotional tool, not only for the students, but also for the college.

Each student initially writes one practice feature story which I mark, give written feedback and conduct lengthy one-on-one consultations. Given that I have about 125 students overall and all of them are writing at least five drafts before the story is considered good enough to be published, this results in a massive amount of written feedback.

Over 10 years, I have tried numerous strategies to try to make this feedback process more effective. When editing the features, I have used a red pen, and given plentiful, explicit, direct error correction concerning both content and sentence-level errors on each draft. Yet despite the written feedback and oral consultations, I have found that the same errors I corrected are repeated in subsequent drafts. Many of the repeated problems were related to grammar and organisation of the story at text level.

**Daniel**

I teach at a university English language centre in an Australian capital city. I teach academic writing to English for Academic Purpose (EAP) students at Direct Entry level in a 13-week course. The students are mostly Chinese with some from European and South American countries such as Poland and Brazil. The students are usually in their early 20s, with an IELTS score of 5.5 or above (a prerequisite for enrolling in the course). They are generally motivated to learn as they need to do well in the course in order to proceed into their discipline-based award courses in the university. Some are also keen to live in Australia and find a new life here. Whatever their reasons for studying EAP, what they are doing will have a big impact on their future goals and as a result, there is a lot of pressure on them to pass the EAP course.

In teaching writing, a lesson might focus on producing a summary paragraph of a reading text; texts are often discipline-based with a topic such as cross-cultural business relations. Another objective might be to write a one-sentence summary for each of the eleven paragraphs either copied or paraphrased and put the sentences into a complete academic style paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence. In the post-writing stage of the lesson, part of the error correction and feedback is from myself and part is from peers when they give feedback on writing to others. Peer writing feedback in my experience is often difficult but necessary for their learning. However most feedback is from myself. This
part of the lesson is very important but quite challenging.

I am sure that there are many ways to give feedback but many of the students are used to a direct method of feedback, where the teacher gives them the correct form. As for me, there are limits to the types of feedback I can use because of the type of class I teach, time constraints and the students’ English level. The goals and entry requirements that students need to meet to go to faculty sometimes don’t coincide with their own English language learning needs.

**Foundational principles of corrective feedback**

The foundational principle of corrective feedback (CF) is that it focuses on errors – often grammatical and lexical – and their correction, either by the teacher, peers and/or student self-correction (e.g., Ren & Hu, 2012; Sato, 2013; Sheen & Ellis, 2011). Through the CF, the student becomes aware of the error and is able to assess her/his efforts against the example provided in the feedback. The understanding is that when the student uses the CF to perform the appropriate corrections (repairs) during a reattempt of the task, learning will occur. The term uptake refers to the process of the student taking up the feedback to correct, or repair, the error; in other words, modifying her/his output as a result of the teacher’s input (Sheen & Ellis, 2011).

From the initial step of drawing the student’s attention to a particular point, or ‘noticing’ (Schmidt, 1990), to repeated practice and refinement, the teacher’s feedback provides the student with targeted input and the opportunity to gain control over her/his L2 production. This process invokes Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Students’ understanding of the feedback is seen to mediate learning by promoting consciousness and performance in the L2, leading to greater independence and automaticity of production.

Teachers generally utilise two modes of feedback, oral and written. Oral feedback is produced in classroom talk between the teacher and students and mostly relates to spoken errors. Written feedback is provided by the teacher on errors in the students’ written work. Key questions in research on written CF are which errors to correct and how; indeed, debate exists about whether errors should be corrected at all (e.g., Krashen, 1982; Truscott, 1996).

For many language teachers the dilemma is how to provide corrective action on sentence-level micro-errors while also addressing meaning. Moreover, how can the time demands of feedback be ameliorated and the locus of authority diffused to peers when the research shows overwhelmingly that learners expect teachers to correct their errors (Hinkel, 2004; Morra & Asis, 2009)? In the following sections, we present additional literature that addresses these dilemmas and was useful to Bronwyn and Daniel in resolving their particular questions about how best to deliver written CF to their students.
Using the literature to improve written corrective feedback

Bronwyn

For my feedback to be effective, I need to examine other strategies beyond just error correction, including student conferences, error log books, peer and self-editing workshops. Part of the reason for this is that while feedback is recognised as playing a crucial role in the teaching of second language writing, the nature of error correction has attracted debate (Brown, 2012). For some researchers, learners’ improvement is a case of acquisition and is best enhanced by writing practice, not corrective feedback. I need to consider recent research from Crosthwaite (2017) who found that short-term English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction did not significantly affect grammatical and lexical errors in adult L2 learners’ writing. I will act on his point that the teacher’s time might be better spent on increasing the volume and variety of writing tasks, an argument that aligns with Krashen (1982) and Truscott (1996) above. Crosthwaite (2017) maintains that this approach will ‘ripen’ the conditions for learner ‘noticing’ and help learners resolve recurring personal errors. I will also take up his suggestion of another ‘non-teacher’ based option which involves developing a corpus of common learner errors that can be incorporated indirectly into learning materials or offered directly to students in guided practice activities (Crosthwaite, 2017).

Peer response is a strategy which would work in my writing classes. Peer comments have come to be viewed as essential and extremely effective (Leki, 2001; Murphy & De Larios, 2010; Ren & Hu, 2012). They are interactive corrective methods and seen as mitigating time demands as well as providing self- and peer-learning opportunities. However, some students do not take their peers’ feedback seriously because they prefer teacher comments, usually because these comments are more specific (Hinkel, 2004; Tsui & Ng, 2000). One way to overcome this issue is in sequencing peers to give their feedback before the teacher, thus maximising the effects of the peer responses (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Sato (2013) found in research on peer interaction and peer corrective feedback that students who had received CF training demonstrated increased willingness and confidence in providing CF. Peers developed trust in their colleagues and increasingly saw them as learning resources. Ren and Hu (2012) state that peer review of writing can be both written and oral; written responses are helpful for low proficiency students while oral review can promote social interaction and reduce misunderstandings between peers. A preferred sequence of peer review is written feedback followed by oral, to allow the formulation of ideas and then their explanation and clarification orally.

Reducing reliance on teacher correction means that students need to become independent and take greater responsibility for their errors, an important aim for
any teacher. As well as establishing a database of common errors and introducing peer feedback, teaching self-correction and self-editing skills is considered useful (Hinkel, 2004; Larrotta & Serrano, 2012). These skills can be facilitated by indirect feedback. Up until now, I have only used direct feedback. Research makes the distinction between indirect feedback and direct feedback. Indirect feedback on writing involves the teacher using codes, underlining, or circling to indicate an error but without correcting it (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Storch, 2010). Conversely, direct feedback occurs when the teacher identifies an error and makes an explicit correction. Direct feedback is often considered better suited to beginners because they do not have the required language knowledge to self-correct. By providing the correct form, the teacher gives the student an accurate model to use in subsequent drafts (Ferris, 2011; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In contrast, indirect feedback involves learners in solving their own writing problems (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). The rationale is that guided problem-solving can lead the learner to greater independence in L2 writing. Direct feedback is seen as input-providing while indirect feedback is output-prompting (Sheen & Ellis, 2011).

Example 1 shows a student text with indirect and direct feedback (Ferris, 2011, p. 95). The sp code is indirect feedback indicating a spelling error and designed to prompt self-correction by the student; to is direct feedback which provides the correct form of the verb.

**Example 1**

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It is possible for some immigrants to be truely happy in America. . . They hope can find happiness . . .
```

After researching this paper, I have decided to try a mix of direct and indirect feedback, but I need to be mindful that I don’t overcorrect. Sometimes doing too much correction may not be necessary if the writing is correct but it is not written the way I would write (Ferris, 2011).

Another idea is to present general feedback to the whole class orally and to build in class time to allow my students to read my feedback (Reinders, Lewis, & Kirkness, 2006). I also need to be aware of how international students may react differently to teacher feedback (Srichanyachon, 2011). I should ask my students what they think of my feedback (Casanave, 2004; Yoshida, 2008). I did ask my students about my use of red pen. While the majority did not seem to mind, one student suggested I use pink. Since then I have always used pink or purple and the response has been positive.
In the post-writing stage of a lesson, error correction and feedback from myself are the main focus. The literature in this area is very important but quite challenging, and gives me new insights into the way teachers can give feedback. Van Beuningen, de Jong and Kuiken (2012, p. 1) comment on their research findings and write that ‘comprehensive corrective feedback is an effective means of improving learners accuracy over time’. That being said, research points to focused corrective feedback which targets particular error types as being more effective than unfocused, or comprehensive, feedback (Kurzer, 2018). One problem with focused feedback, however, is that teachers may focus on a narrow range of errors that do not actually match the students’ needs.

The idea of giving different types of feedback at different stages of the writing process seems to be of great importance especially in EAP where there is a big focus on reading and writing. Also direct and indirect styles of feedback are necessary for the students that I teach, as most of them could, at their level of English, learn from them. However, many of the students prefer the direct method because that is what they are used to.

Research offers a number of suggestions to improve feedback. Dynamic written corrective feedback (DWCF) developed by Hartshorn, Evans, Merrill, Sudweeks, Strong-Krause and Anderson (2010) is a method that I am aware of and do to some extent. Hartshorn et al. (2010) define DWCF as, ‘having two essential elements: feedback that reflects the individual learner needs most as demonstrated by what the learner produces; and a principled approach to pedagogy that ensures that writing tasks and feedback are meaningful, timely, constant and manageable for both student and teacher’ (p. 87). Yet DWCF does have limits in the type of class I teach as there are goals and entry requirements that students need to meet to go to faculty which sometimes do not coincide with their own needs.

The process of DWCF involves individualising feedback for students who write for about 10 minutes a day on a given topic at regular intervals, for instance, daily or weekly (Kurzer, 2018). The teacher provides indirect feedback using codes which the students self-correct and return to the teacher in a process that is repeated until the text is error free. The students keep records of their errors so they can study and correct the patterns, and as a result increase their learning and autonomy as editors of their own writing.

In recent research on DWCF, Kurzer (2018) found that the process helped university EAP students develop their independence as self-editors and significantly decreased trends on all error types – categorised as global (errors that impede meaning),
local (errors that do not impede meaning but ‘may be irritating’) and mechanical (punctuation and spelling problems) (p. 12).

Error types can be confusing and teachers have to decide how broad or narrow they want the categories to be (Ferris, 2011). An example of broad codes is V = verb problem; WO = word order problem; Λ = word missing (Scrivener, 1998). Narrower categories might divide verb issues into verb tense problems (VT), verb form errors such as passive and active voice (VF), and subject-verb agreement (SV). Kurzer’s (2018, p. 30) categories include: global errors: verb form (VF); verb time (VT); sentence structure (SS); local errors: prepositions (PP); determiners (articles) (D); noun form (NF); and mechanical errors: spelling (SPG); punctuation (P); capital letter (CL).

Clear checklists and categories of what will be corrected are helpful so both teachers and students have the same expectations. The problem is that too many categories can overwhelm both the teacher and students. For example, Ferris (2011) warns that 15 to 20 narrow categories are too many.

Another recommendation is to give negative and positive feedback to maintain student motivation as some teachers only comment on the negative and what the students need to do to improve (Kroll, 1997). Ellis (2009) agrees with the idea that it is important to adjust feedback according to the learner’s level of development; however, there is no one method that is a feedback solution for all types of students. Clearly the literature presents the positive and negative aspects of error correction and feedback and the views on how it can be beneficial or detrimental to students and teachers.

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have presented two teachers’ concerns and strategies for improving written corrective feedback drawing on research findings and recommendations in the literature. We provide these reflections as an opportunity to share examples of changed practice in what is a challenging area of second language teaching. We want to highlight the insights gained from the literature on teacher feedback practice and acknowledge the value of linking theory and practice for the mutual benefit of both.

**References**


**Margaret Kettle** is a Senior Lecturer in TESOL at Queensland University of Technology. She currently teaches on the Master of Education (TESOL) in areas of second language teaching and learning, and sociolinguistics. She was previously a CELTA trainer and ELICOS teacher.

m.kettle@qut.edu.au

**Bronwyn Watson** is a journalist and English language teacher with experience of teaching journalistic writing at a tertiary college in Australia. She is interested in corrective written feedback that addresses the generic requirements of feature writing as well as the language needs of students.

bronwatson@gmail.com

**Daniel Murphy** is an English language teacher at a university language college in Australia. He specialises in the teaching of EAP, especially academic writing.

danielmurphy4956@gmail.com
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E-learning made simple

MICHELLE OCRICIANO

In the past 20 years, education has witnessed an e-learning boom, with universities, colleges, schools and even private tutors using some form of e-learning. In this period, blended learning became the new go-to with its idea of having a portion of the traditional face-to-face instruction replaced by web-based online learning. It didn’t take long for the flipped classroom to appear as an unfolding of blended learning. The flipped classroom is supposed to be a reversal of traditional teaching where students gain first exposure to new material outside of class, usually via reading or lecture videos, and then class time is used to do the harder work of assimilating that knowledge through strategies such as problem-solving, discussion or debates.

I was one of the teachers who saw e-learning boom. E-learning became my attempt to further support students that I usually did not have time to help in class as much as I wanted to. These students usually described their vocabulary as weak and claimed they lacked information about topics in general. In addition to that, they also were unlikely to understand authentic language, believed writing was confusing and found answering questions a terrifying task when unsure of the answer.

If my story sounds familiar, then image annotation might be your solution. It works with classic blended learning, the more modern flipped classroom and it is also a possibility for those who just want to incorporate some e-learning into their toolbox.
In this article I will recommend an image annotator and give suggestions for creating a clear and effective e-learning platform that is easy for students to access, and simple for teachers to add resources to and embed in learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle or Blackboard.

**First things first**

The first thing we need is a canvas. Like the one a painter uses, this is an empty space that can hold an image. However, this will then be used as a place to add our resources and activities. Our canvas is therefore usually called an ‘image annotator’. I like to use ThingLink (www.thinglink.com) because it can be easily embedded in most LMS and is really user-friendly. To start, consider the topic you are teaching and find a picture that represents it. This picture should have only one focal point as it can look confusing and even overwhelming when too much information is added. Alternatively, geometric patterns or plain colours can also be used to achieve a clean look. Once the visual is chosen, annotate the image by adding links to the resources you need (see Figure 1). There are lots of ideas below and you can see an example of what the finished version might look like here: https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1007844918544039937

![Example of an annotated image](https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1007844918544039937)

**Figure 1. Example of an annotated image**

**Focus on vocabulary**

You can easily present new or review important vocabulary with flashcard tools such as Quizlet (www.quizlet.com) or Cram (www.cram.com). The possibilities are endless with flashcards: word and definition, word and picture, word and translation, word followed by preposition, word and sentence . . . the sky is the limit. If you need help
to write simple definitions, a dictionary such as Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary (https://dictionary.cambridge.org) or Collins (www.collinsdictionary.com) can be useful. And to find examples of authentic language in use, try Skell (https://skell.sketchengine.co.uk), a free and intuitive tool to easily check how a particular phrase or word is used by real speakers of English.

**Focus on game-based review**

Kahoot (https://kahoot.com) and Quizizz (https://quizizz.com) are game-based classroom response systems played by the whole class synchronously or asynchronously. Use them to introduce, practice or review content – and have fun! If your students like competitions, create a leader board and display their results. This can be a good way to integrate online activities and classroom work. In addition to that, the data generated from the game on students’ performance can also be used to inform future activities and points to be reviewed.

**Focus on listening**

Although teachers often talk about top-down/meaning-building skills, when it comes to listening, there is usually very little time to devote to developing decoding skills, especially at lower levels, where students’ vocabulary is more limited. A simple way of helping students learn to decode is to use Tubequizard (www.tubequizard.com), which creates interactive listening quizzes based on subtitled YouTube videos. There are pre-made quizzes or you can develop your own. However, if you don’t have time to design your own quizzes, simply choose a YouTube video and the website will automatically generate a variety of listening quizzes that can be selected according to students’ needs. Some of the features that can support decoding skills are the quizzes that include disappearing sounds such as /t/, /d/, /s/, /m/, /n/, /l/ and /f/. There is also the Top 50 and Top 30 two-word chunks. Another good feature is grammar and pronunciation for listening, and vocabulary and grammar in context. Some of their subcategories include singular and plural nouns, past simple regular and irregular verbs, superlative adjectives and even the Academic Word List.

Another useful tool is PlayPosit (https://learn.playposit.com). Here you can create and share interactive video lessons based on any online video and transform what is traditionally passive content into an active experience for students with time-embedded activities. The free version will give you access to most resources but the paid one will provide a variety of question types.

If the lesson is focused on listening for gist or critical thinking, then simply choose videos about the given topic and ask students to answer who, what, where, when, how and why. They take notes and can share them in the classroom or online. TED talks are great sources (www.ted.com)
**Focus on consolidation**

When students already ‘know’ the vocabulary, have already practiced the grammar and understand the information, it is time for consolidation. One very useful website is LearningApps (https://learningapps.org). Teachers can choose from a variety of tools including cloze exercises, sequencing, multiple choice and even a timeline. The website is user-friendly and has over 20 types of interactions – one of them will certainly suit your students’ needs.

**Focus on writing**

Providing a pressure-free environment for writing practice is welcomed by students and Padlet (https://padlet.com) can help you with that. It is a great tool for students to interact and share ideas, videos, texts and images. They can either write together or individually using the platform or by uploading documents to it. Padlet can also be used for lead-in, brainstorming and mind mapping activities. Other possible uses include online (writing) portfolios, note-taking and teaching independent learning skills. However, do note that recently the number of Padlets allowed in the free version has been restricted. For students who need more structure when writing essays, particularly at an early stage, the EssayMap (www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/essaymap) is a simple tool that clearly and visually shows students all the different parts of a basic essay. It even includes separate boxes for topic sentences for each paragraph and when the essay is ready it can be saved or printed.

**Sharing is caring**

Now that the image is fully annotated, it is time to share it with your students. ThingLink can be shared in various ways, for example via Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and other social networks. There is also the possibility of simply sharing the link by copying and pasting or even embedding the image to an LMS such as Moodle or Blackboard. Another way of doing it is by using a QR code. A QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response Code) is a type of barcode made of black squares arranged in a square grid on a white background, which can be read by most smartphone cameras or by a QR code reader. For instance, the QR code on the left takes you to the example ThingLink page mentioned earlier.
I use QR Stuff (www.qrstuff.com) to create the code and share it by printing a big one on an A4 sheet or small ones that students can collect and take home. If you prefer a more environmentally friendly approach, simply use a projector to display the QR code.

**Reality check?**

For the past three years, I worked for universities on long term contracts and was given time to plan and prepare my lessons and was also paid decently to do it. I used to teach the same course every 10 weeks and had time to find its deficiencies and a way to overcome them. This allowed me to feel that I was delivering the best possible course my students could have. However, my story is far from being the reality for most teachers around the world. In many countries, including Australia, the ELT sector suffers from severe casualisation which can heavily impact the lives of teachers, and how courses are delivered. Teachers usually have their students’ best interest at heart but it is unrealistic to imagine that they will create a unit of e-learning every week. So if you liked the ideas here, but don’t want to be overwhelmed, try starting with only one item or idea and adding others gradually. For example, you could start with key words from every unit. You could also consider tackling e-learning as a group where every teacher can collaborate by contributing a small part. As you can see, there are many ways of beginning to incorporate e-learning. I hope this article is useful in this new teaching mission – should you choose to accept it!

Michelle Ocriciano is a teacher and Academic Manager at Academia International. She has been involved in ELT for the past 19 years. Her interests are technology, teacher education, professional development and sociolinguistics.

michelle.ocriciano@gmail.com

Twitter: @mi_ocriciano
Using drama to help students flourish in English

Melinda Gamlen

Drama provides a space to reduce down the clutter of the conventional classroom to the basic communicative purpose of language. In this article, I will outline why drama is such an effective teaching tool, and give advice for teachers on how to begin. To give background and context, I will describe what is involved in my theatre courses that are structured around a rehearsal process. However, in recognition that a full theatre course is demanding on time, I also include outlines for a set of four short drama workshops.

Some teachers may feel anxious about or unsuited to teaching drama; however, be assured that an experienced teacher already has the skills needed: the ability to analyse language content, and to manage groups and to work toward learning goals. You only have to go as far as you are comfortable, which will ensure that your students are also comfortable. Drama activities are highly flexible and allow for as much or as little guidance as needed.

Why drama works

Changing the space
Changing the physical space changes the psychological space. Reducing the clutter of desks, chairs, and IT equipment to create a virtually empty space removes physical barriers between students and prepares them for a different way of learning.

Communicative competence
The need for communicative competence is very real. Fellow ‘actors’ and the audience will not understand if lines are not delivered clearly and with understanding. Drama classes provide a space for language analysis and intensive practice of pronunciation, prosody and fluency, with real-time individual feedback.

Teamwork
Drama is excellent for working in a team. Many international students suffer from culture shock associated with the isolation that comes from migrating away from family into a new society. Drama can help students by integrating them into a positive, confident, and focused community of peers.
A goal and a deadline
Working towards the goal of a performance is highly motivating and gives a strong sense of focus and purpose. The deadline for a performance is very real and cannot be extended!

Cultural engagement
Rehearsing and performing a script gives students direct access to the literary culture of English and a wealth of language that is rich in idiom and collocation.

Language internalisation
A rehearsal process brings benefits from repetitive exposure to the language, with the result that the learners internalise much of the entire script. The physical movement that accompanies the language makes it more meaningful and memorable.

The theatre course
Structure and content
The theatre courses described here were taught in Oxford, England, over a two-year period; 10 courses in total. Around 50 hours over five weeks was about the right length of time to lift a one-hour play from script to stage.

Classes began with physical and voice warm-ups, improvisation, or group focus exercises. There were four ‘acting workshops’ at various points in the course. Rehearsals progressed from an initial seated reading, to ‘blocking’ the action, to rehearsals by scene and rehearsals, and finally an evening performance in a professional theatre. An audio recording of the script provided a useful model for the students, as well as being a tool for the memorisation process. A teacher as ‘mentor’ took on the roles of two or three minor characters.

The students
The courses did not attract mainly extroverts; the vast majority had never acted before. About the same number of men joined as women. Nationalities included Europeans, Latin Americans, East Asians, and Middle Eastern students. Language
ability ranged from low intermediate to advanced, and students came from a variety of contexts: Oxford University postgraduates and visiting academics, private language school students, and permanent migrants among others. There was even one native speaker of English who joined a course!

**The script**
The theatre courses were focused around a script, chosen according to a rule of ‘three Fs’: famous, funny, and free to perform. It was important for the language to be contemporary so that it was useful for the student to invest time memorising and internalising it. To this end, I used artfully abridged and modernised versions of plays. Students were given a roughly equal number of lines (around 50–80).

**The ACKT workshops**
The content of these workshops is built around four key competencies from the theatre course, with the development of the ‘whole person’ in mind: ACKT stands for the Articulate, Confident, Knowledgeable Team player. Each workshop is about 60 minutes, but can be reduced even further by allocating Workshop 3 as homework only. (See reference list for full source details for activities below.)

**Workshop 1: Articulate**

**Overview**
Becoming articulate is about preparing very much in the way an actor does, through awareness of the body, breath and voice, as well as work on pronunciation and prosody using poetry and rhyme. A useful mnemonic here for necessary work on pronunciation and prosody is ‘RIPE’ (Rhythm, Intonation, Projection, Enunciation).

**Procedure / Suggested Materials**

*Warming up*
James Clifford Turner’s book *Voice and Speech in the Theatre* (2007), includes warm-up routines for actors. The five elements are: Relaxation and Posture, Breathing, Tone, Pitch, and Articulation.

*Rhythm*
Michael Vaughan Reese’s ‘This is the House That Jack Built’ (2010) for stress-timing.

*Intonation*
Mark Almond’s ‘Emotional Mingles’ (2005) gets students to recognise and use intonation to express emotions.
Projection
Poems are good for voice projection, for example, ‘From a Railway Carriage’ by J.M. Barrie or ‘The Highwayman’ by Alfred Noyes.

Enunciation
To work on, for example, alliteration or consonant clusters, students could try J.R.R. Tolkien’s poem ‘Cat’, or G.M. Hopkins’ ‘Binsey Poplars’. Tongue twisters are also very useful.

WORKSHOP 2: CONFIDENT

Overview
Becoming confident is about learning to adopt a new role and persona, which comes with speaking your non-native language in a new cultural environment. It is about building a character – something which drama teaches very deliberately.

Procedure /Suggested Materials
This workshop requires a script of a short, simple, rhythmic dialogue (only about one minute long). The language should have an authentic feel and an element of ‘mystery’ is desirable; the scene should create visual imagery and prompt questions. Avoid sketches written for students as the language and content is usually inauthentic. A suggestion is Harold Pinter’s The Dumb Waiter. An extract could be selected from various videos of the play on Youtube (but students must only hear, not see, the recording).
These elements should be identified and/or practised:

1. Gist questions after first listening
2. Identifying and practising prosodic features: stress, intonation, connected speech features
3. Verbally imitating a character’s lines from the recording
4. Character development, e.g., What does the character look like? What is their personality?
5. In pairs, adding 10–15 more lines to the dialogue in the same style
6. Practising the dialogue; memorising lines outside class

**Workshop 3: Knowledgeable**

**Overview**

Becoming knowledgeable is about developing a sophisticated, advanced level of understanding of the language, and internalising it through repetition and physical action.

**Procedure / Suggested Materials**

Use the same script used in Workshop 2. The following elements should be identified and analysed:

1. Subtext (such as power dynamics between the characters)
2. Fixed phrases or collocation
3. Useful grammatical patterns

Pairs practise the dialogue in the same role as before, changing focus each time:

1. Intonation/emotion
2. Sentence stress
3. Connected speech

It is essential that students move, gesture, and make eye contact. Lines must be memorised before the final workshop.

**Workshop 4: Team Player**

**Overview**

Becoming a team player is about students supporting each other and feeling culturally engaged in a foreign language context.
**Procedure / Suggested Materials**

Students watch another pair perform their memorised dialogue and give constructive feedback. All pairs then perform for the class and have a follow-up discussion on their experience.

**Conclusion**

Drama helps students to become articulate, confident, knowledgeable team players in a new cultural environment. It shifts them out of the ordinary classroom into a different physical and psychological space, and gives them the clear, motivating goal of performing for an audience. They internalise useful language, develop confidence, and improve pronunciation and fluency very quickly. Students get a window into a wealth of literature, which gives a deeper cultural understanding of English and lessens the impact of culture shock. Drama helps them integrate, to build teams and real friendships, and it engages the emotions as well as the intellect.

Drama is timeless and, unlike digital platforms, involves communication in physical space, costs little, and will not go out of date. So try it with your class – start off small with a warm-up and build on this in future lessons. You will be surprised and delighted by how your students will flourish.

**References**


Melinda Gamlen won the English Australia Award for Contribution to Professional Practice in 2017 for her paper ‘How Drama Helps Global Citizens to Flourish in English.’ She is an EAP Lecturer for Trinity College at the University of Melbourne.

mgamlen@trinity.unimelb.edu.au
Encouraging in-class reflection and rapport through multimedia

Natasha Kitano & Josie Healy

Teaching practices often evolve as teachers share and collaborate together. The teaching approaches illustrated here are a result of teachers sharing classroom experiences. They focus on students’ creativity and are based on the view that students ‘will become more effective learners . . . if they can recognise and harness their own creative abilities’ (Jackson, Oliver, Shaw, & Wisdom, 2006, p. 1). These approaches make use of multimedia – that is, a mixture of text, still images, audio and interactive content using computerised and electronic devices – which have allowed us to capture our students’ creativity.

In this article, we will outline two lesson approaches that can be used for a variety of purposes. While we implemented them as part of a postgraduate course and an EAP program, we believe that these creative activities can be manipulated to suit any classroom where reflection and rapport are valued.

**Approach 1: Using multimedia to promote reflection**

**Aim**
The aim of this activity is to facilitate students’ reflection on a semester’s learning. The reflection is designed to allow students to process their experiences in order to better apply their learning in new situations. The underlying idea is that when students combine the visual, auditory, verbal and kinaesthetic modes, their reflection is enhanced. Reflection can be a much more authentic and effective way of capturing the student experience rather than reducing it to the aggregated number resulting from typical student evaluation surveys.

**Materials**
- One blank A4 sheet of paper per student
- A set of 50 photos for a class of approx. 40 students
- Phone/camera

**Procedure**

**Lesson 1: Workshop (50 mins, approx. 40 students)**
I begin by leading students in a five-minute guided reflection of their semester. The
students then choose one photo from a large pack (sight unseen) to use a stimulus for writing metaphorically about their learning during the semester (see example in Appendix A). I then give each student an A4 sheet to fold in three horizontally. They write the number of the photo and the word ‘Highlight’ in the top third. I usually model this on the whiteboard and explain what a ‘highlight’ means. The students then write for 5 minutes about what was the best moment for them in the semester using the photo as a stimulus. We repeat this process twice, but in the middle third of the paper, the heading and focus is the ‘Low point’ and in the bottom third heading and focus is 'Future Use'. I collect all responses. They can add their name or remain anonymous.

**Lesson 2: Tutorial (30 minutes, approx. 20 students)**

In this lesson, the students take a photo which represents their learning. I prepare the students by reminding them of the workshop activity and saying: ‘You have about 10 minutes to take a photograph to represent symbolically/metaphorically what it has been like for you to be in this unit this semester. I expect to see many different types of photographs and many different approaches to how a photograph is taken. The quality of the photograph is not important. After you have taken the photo, email it to me with a short reflective paragraph about why you took that particular photo and how it represents your experience this semester.’

I read and collate all the workshop and tutorial responses (see example in Appendix B). The recurring themes provide me not only with a strong sense of how the whole cohort has reacted to the teaching and content of the unit, but also with the impetus to reflect on what modifications might improve the student experience.

**Approach 2: Using multimedia to promote rapport**

**Aim**

The aim of the activity is to develop classroom rapport. Establishing rapport between teacher and student at the beginning of the program and also developing personal relationships in a relaxed classroom environment is paramount for the creation of an improved learning space. Robinson (2001, p. 67) believes that creativity is ‘the process of having original ideas that have value’ and this activity allows students to be creative through the use of multimedia. It allays student anxiety and builds confidence, both of which are particularly important to language students (Barnes & Lock, 2010). Most importantly, it demonstrates that I value my students’ creative contributions.

**Materials**

For students:

- phone/camera
For teachers:

- PowerPoint
- a computer connected to a viewing screen with audio capabilities

**Procedure**

Each student’s homework on the first day of the course is to take a photo of a scene or an image which represents their state of mind at that moment. It is the only homework task I give on the first day, as they have already been inundated with course information and this creative task is a great way for them to take everything in, especially if they have just arrived to their host country.

The students are then told to email the image to me with a few short sentences which describe their image and why they chose it (see example in Appendix C). I then compile their photos into a PowerPoint presentation. On the last lesson of the first week, I set aside some time to enjoy the photo images with the whole class. I set a 15–20 second interval timer on the PowerPoint which gives the students enough time to look at the image and read the script. The slides merely show the image and the sentences, and the name of the creator is not revealed. I think during this initial showing there is a sense of relief at their anonymity. The students always have a keen interest in the images of their classmates, that is, the people with whom they will study for the next three months. This is the moment when rapport and the development of personal relationships begins. Adding background music to the PowerPoint also sets a relaxed mood in the classroom.

At the end of the course, I set aside some time again to replay the PowerPoint presentation. It always fills me with delight when I see the students’ faces as they reflect on their images — now no longer anonymous — and experience the sense of joy that classroom rapport and collegial spirit can evoke. It provides a wonderful sense of completion and fulfilment.

**Conclusion**

We acknowledge that our students have grown up in a digital culture and are competent with technology and thus, they both appreciate it and are motivated by the use of it. Advances in technology have made it easier to incorporate multimedia strategies in the classroom, and teaching with multimedia has been found to enhance a ‘sense of accomplishment and self-esteem’ for language learners (Choi & Yi, 2016, p. 304). These teaching approaches have evolved from facilitating reflection to creating rapport. Our hope is that through sharing our experiences the evolution will continue.
References


Josie Healy is a Senior Educator at Queensland University of Technology International College (QUTIC), and has worked as Director of Studies (Foundation and Bridging programs). She has been teaching international students in university entrance programs for 20 years. She is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) and co-chairs the QUTIC Professional Development Committee.

jf.healy@qut.edu.au

Natasha Kitano has been an ESL educator for 23 years in both Asia and Australia. She has worked as the Curriculum Coordinator for a College in Tokyo, and she has worked in both University Entry and English Language Programs at QUT, in Brisbane. Natasha has also been a teacher trainer for students of TESOL.

natasha.kitano@qut.edu.au
APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF STUDENT RESPONSE TO A SELECTED PHOTO

Sense of Capability

Some leaves grow in green, but not grow too strong. They turn yellow and fall down, but they never disappear.

In my lifelong learning tree, there are also some yellow leaves. Feeling nervous during the seminar, feeling crazy and helpless when preparing the essay, trying to balance the time and energy among studying, working, entertainment and caring for family.

Sometimes it is hard. But, when I finished one thing I can look back at those yellow leaves. They gave me power to face the problems.

Slide © Josie Healy

Photo ©Anne Russell, www.russellsynergies.com.au, shared with permission
This picture resembles where I am at this stage. The leaf has some rain drops on it and half of it is in the shade while the other part is in the sun. The meaning of the part that’s in the shade means the part where I was in the shade of being unknowledgeable of some of the regulations at QUT and when I enrolled in the bridging course late I entered the course by the end of week three kept me in the shade for several weeks later and the rain drops are loads on the leaf which resemble the different loads that I had at that time. The part that is in the sun resemble the time that I came out of the shade and into the sun where everything became clear and I knew what to do and how. And the rain drops also resemble the different loads that I had after I went into the sun.
APPENDIX C
EXAMPLE OF STUDENT WRITING AND PHOTO ON DAY 1 OF A PROGRAM

‘This is the great opportunity that I am expressing my feelings to you. Today first I was worried about my English and was thinking that I do not know how I will learn English and how would be teacher because there are a lot of changes in atmosphere, culture and learning process but after having session with you I am quite satisfied and expecting that your effective teaching methods will definitely improve my English as well as my whole personality. Today my feelings are like this pic. Now I am standing on road but after having only one session with you I can see a lot of paths heading towards the great success of my future.

I would like to thank the management of QUT who has appointed a very lovely and brilliant teacher for us’.
You’ll know Antonia Clare’s name from the cover of familiar coursebooks such as *Total English*, and *Speakout* (Pearson). Over the years she has worked extensively in Europe, Hong Kong and South Africa, as a teacher, trainer and frequent presenter. Excitingly, however, her plenary at the English Australia Conference 2018 in Sydney marks her first visit to Australia. In this issue’s Ten Questions we explore the life of a materials writer in ESL, the impact of the digital revolution, and how coursebooks should be used in teacher training. On top of all that, we also get a sneak peek at the content of her upcoming plenary. Enjoy!
1. Can you tell us a bit about your personal ELT journey?

It all started with a passion for Italy. After graduating in Psychology in London, I moved to Italy and fell in love with all things Italian – the food, the architecture, the language. Italy is where I started teaching, and it’s where my heart lies.

I’ve always enjoyed writing, and putting together my own materials for students. When I was working at International House in London, a publisher came to the school looking for potential writers. I went along, mainly because they were offering a free lunch, but J.J. Wilson and I decided to put forward a proposal. We really enjoyed the process, trying to come up with interesting ideas, and we were lucky enough to get the contract. We’ve been writing together ever since.

2. Is professional materials writing a realistic aim for teachers looking for career development? What advice do you have for teachers who would like to ‘break into’ professional materials writing?

I think it’s still a great option for teachers. And nowadays there are lots of opportunities for self-publishing as well as working with traditional publishers. I helped put together a free e-book a few years ago with advice for teachers interested in finding out how things work. It’s called *The No-Nonsense Guide to Writing* (ELT Writers Connected, 2015) and it’s available to download here: http://eltwriters.dudeney.com/thebook.html

There is also a lot more training available. I’ve recently started working on the Materials Development module for NILE’s MA in Professional Development for Language Education, validated by the University of Chichester, for example.

3. Could you explain ‘PARSNIP’ to our readers and talk a little about what restrictions, considerations, and responsibilities you feel as a coursebook writer, in this regard?

Publishers have a list of taboos, commonly known by the acronym PARSNIP: politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, ‘-isms’, and pork. Writers of global coursebooks cannot touch these subjects for fear of offending the markets and thereby sabotaging potential sales. It means that coursebooks are sometimes accused of being ‘bland and anodyne’ (Sarceni, 2013). Luckily, most of the materials I write are not destined for extremely conservative markets, so we can be a little bit flexible. Also, working with the BBC, there are very clear guidelines to follow to ensure inclusivity. We need to be able to talk openly about important issues, to push boundaries, but at the same time, we should be sensitive, both as teachers and writers, to our learners and their context.
4. One charge frequently levelled at General English coursebook producers is the persistence of the grammar-based syllabus (well disguised though it may be). What are your thoughts on this?

I love the idea of well-disguised grammar syllabus! When I first started writing, I wanted to write a coursebook which didn’t focus on grammar at all, but took a more lexical approach. My editor rejected the idea.

The problem with writing a book that has no grammar is that nobody will buy it. Students, teachers and Ministries of Education all want and expect grammar to be dealt with systematically. Just look at the popularity of books like *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy (Cambridge University Press). It may or may not be the most effective way to learn a language, but I think the grammar syllabus will persist.

However, it’s not the only thing that goes on in a global coursebook. The methodology has shifted. It’s not that we try to disguise the grammar, not at all. But when I’m writing a lesson, the grammar is not the starting point. I never begin with the idea that I need to write a lesson about the Present Perfect. I try to write lessons that deal with texts and topics that will engage the learners (and hopefully the teachers), that will give them something they want to talk about. And then we look at what language the learner will need to help them achieve the tasks.

5. What changes have you seen, for better or for worse, with the advent of online and digital resources in ELT publishing?

On the whole, I think the opportunities offered by digital are fantastic, but we need to be sure that writers, like musicians, can still earn money from the products they are creating. Digital has created a world where everybody expects everything for free. When we don’t pay for goods, or we expect to get everything really cheaply, then someone somewhere suffers. I think as consumers, we need to be aware of that.

6. What would your ideal ‘future coursebook’ look like? (It might not have to be a book!)

I could tell you that, but then I might have to kill you.
7. Do you think coursebooks should be used on pre-service teacher-training courses like CELTA? Why or why not? What ‘coursebook literacy’ do you think teachers may need to learn?

I think it’s a good idea to help new teachers work effectively with a coursebook. Most schools will require them to work with a book, so they need to know how to make the most of it. And coursebooks have a training element too, so you can learn a lot about how to improve your teaching through using a good book. You need to be able to know how to take the material off the page and work with what’s happening in the room. However, I think trainee teachers should also have the opportunity to adapt material, or create their own materials, and experiment with that.

8. The majority teachers are caught up in their day to day needs and probably turn a blind eye to copyright – is this something that bothers you, as a materials creator?

Yes. Copyright theft is a real problem. It’s something we need to talk about. In fact, we set up Free and Fair ELT to look specifically at this issue. It’s a Facebook page where we can share free, good quality, legal materials.

9. As a long term advocate of video in ELT, can you share what you see as the importance of the use of visual texts in the classroom?

We are living through a video revolution. Video is everywhere, and it’s such a powerful resource. It’s how young people communicate, so it makes absolute sense for us to work with video in the classroom, and to look at the skills involved. But we need to be critical in our use of video, thinking about what we use, and how we use it. And crucially, to look at how to get learners creating their own videos too. I’m a member of the Visual Arts Circle (https://visualartscircle.com) which is a community of language teaching professionals, teachers, teacher trainers, writers, researchers, designers, artists, photographers, filmmakers – all who share a belief that incorporating the visual arts is an extremely effective way of improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the field of language education.

10. You will be a plenary speaker at the English Australia Conference 2018. Can you give us a taster of what you will be talking about?

I’ll be talking about creativity, how important it is for us as teachers to be able to work creatively, how important it is for our learners, and how we need to be able to resist the sometimes stifling pressures of standardisation, to dare to be different. I’m really excited to be coming to Australia, as I’ve never been before, so I’ll be looking for lots of creative things to see and do during my free weekend in Sydney!
References


Antonia Clare is a teacher trainer, conference speaker and writer, with a passion for creativity. She is a lover of language, words, books and coffee.

antoniacleare@aol.com

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/antonia.clare

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If you would like to write an article in Classroom Talk for the English Australia Journal, please contact:

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ETpedia Technology
500 ideas for using technology in the English language classroom

NICKY HOCKLY

Pavilion Publishing and Media, 2017

Reviewed by James Heath

ETpedia Technology is a collection of 500 practical ideas for using technology with English language learners. It is aimed at teachers or teacher trainers, but also has some information for academic managers. As with other titles in the ETpedia series, the 500 ideas are organised into units of 10 short tips on a particular topic, such as ‘10 Ways to Use Technology for Vocabulary’ or ‘10 Things to Know about Augmented Reality’. These practical units are grouped into sections which focus on language skills (e.g., reading or listening) and technology type (e.g., text-based tools, like blogs and wikis; multimedia tools, like video and Skype; or devices, like smartphones and tablets). The book encourages teachers to dip into units that are of interest and that complement their coursebook, or to overcome ‘teacher’s block’ by opening a page at random and trying out one of the tips that may be useful for their learners. Although this may sound like an invitation to use technology for technology’s sake, the book does emphasise the ‘principled and informed use of technology . . . [in order to] enhance and support your students’ learning of English’ (p. 11).

When writing a book about technology for teachers, authors must answer a difficult question: do they recommend specific websites and apps that teachers can use immediately (e.g., Screencast-O-Matic), but run the risk of these becoming obsolete, or give more general suggestions about a software category (e.g., screen capture software), which teachers may have difficulty engaging with? The book’s author,
Nicky Hockly, who is Director of Pedagogy at The Consultants-E and has published and presented widely on the use of technology in language teaching, addresses this challenge fairly well. She often recommends multiple websites in a category and, when these are too numerous to mention, she suggests searching online for ‘ESL (or EFL) grammar games’ or ‘EFL (or ESL) pronunciation’. In these cases, an online content curation tool that is updated regularly may also be useful for finding good quality sites quickly, and so Hockly recommends, for example, Nik Peachey’s and the Consultants-E’s Scoop.it accounts (www.scoop.it).

The book’s practical activities are bookended by an initial section on ‘Preparing to Teach with Technology’, which includes relevant questions to ask students about the types of technology they would like to use and tips for planning a digital policy for protecting student data, and by two final sections on ‘Teaching Contexts and Issues’ and ‘Further Development’. The initial section includes pertinent units on blended learning and the flipped classroom, e-safety, copyright and plagiarism, digital literacies, and using technology with special educational needs (SEN) students. The final section provides advice for teachers on improving their own digital skills through, for example, installing several browsers to work with different websites, and encouraging some students to be ‘digital leaders’. The last unit of this section, ‘10 Ways to Manage Your Time Effectively’, provides some useful advice on ‘just-in-time learning’, (i.e., learning to use a technology only when you need it), and on following technology experts on social media who can filter useful information for you. It also gives the final tip of the book: ‘switch off . . . [and] ensure that you regularly take time off line’ (p. 177).

One criticism of the book is that there are no references to research. Borg (2010) identifies a number of benefits for teachers of engaging with research, including exploring a ‘deeper sense of their work’ and examining ‘their planning and decision-
making processes’ (p. 414), but notes many barriers to accessing it. Not including references is certainly such a barrier. For example, Hockly writes, ‘There are research studies to show that some technologies can motivate English language students’ (p. 13), without mentioning which studies of which technologies. Similarly, she writes, ‘in one study, students who used flashcards on their mobile phones to learn new vocabulary seemed to have better recall and retention than students who learned the same vocabulary on paper’ (p. 13). I would have liked to know the context of this study, the type of technology that was used, the participants and the effect size, but without a reference, I could not find this information. While not all teachers will be interested in following up on these points, without citations, readers are left to accept Hockly’s interpretation of these studies, and so the lack of research engagement Borg describes is perpetuated.

This criticism aside, one of my favourite themes throughout the book is using technology to help students foster a cultural connection to English and link their classroom to the outside world. For example, one activity encourages students to explore their own interests by following topics or celebrities on English language social media and then to report back to the class with regular updates (p. 128). Another is geocaching, where participants play a real-world treasure-hunt-style game to look for small boxes with logbooks, called geocaches, using GPS coordinates (p. 136). A third is using augmented reality apps to explore landmarks in the local area.

I also found many activities useful in my current EAP teaching context, including those aimed at developing critical thinking. Suggestions include doing a fact check on an infographic (a visually rich information source) by using several sources to verify the information presented (p. 94), or creating and presenting original infographics that synthesise information from various sources (p. 95). Similarly, some activities are designed to develop information literacy by, for example, analysing spoof websites (p. 157), such as *Save the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus* (Zapato, 1998).

While many of the ideas in *ETpedia Technology* require high-resource settings, where there is access to video projectors or interactive whiteboards in class, and students have smartphones or tablets, many are also achievable with fewer resources or older technology, such as email for chain stories or interviews. Overall, I found the book offered valuable suggestions for teachers working in a variety of contexts and feel that the book would serve as a useful supplement for language teachers wanting to enhance their students’ learning through technology.
REFERENCES


**James Heath** is an English language teacher and researcher at UNSW Institute of Languages. He shares lesson plans and teaching ideas at www.eltideas.com.

j.heath@unsw.edu.au

Twitter: @eltideas

If you would like to write a review for the *English Australia Journal*, please contact the Reviews Editor: reviews@englishaustralia.com.au
The English for Academic Purposes Practitioner
Operating on the edge of academia

ALEX DING & IAN BRUCE

Palgrave Macmillan, 2017

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN BRUCE

In 2002, R.R. Jordan published a personal reflection on the history and development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Britain, tracing its origins back to the early 1960s when increasing numbers of international students began to make their way to UK campuses. Although the context might be specifically British, the development described mirrors that of EAP in many other countries, where EAP began as a response to growing numbers of international students, and as an attempt to help these students with the linguistic challenges of tertiary study through English. In effect, Jordan was attempting to write an origins story for EAP, to identify landmarks in its genesis and development. Ding and Bruce have written something more ambitious. The English for Academic Purposes Practitioner is a state of the union address, a passionate critique of the working conditions and status of EAP practitioners and a call to arms to its readership – made explicit in its dedication ‘To the EAP Community’.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first two present an overview of the context from which this book arises and discuss the identity of the EAP practitioner. The context, in short, is what the authors describe as the creeping influence of neoliberal ideology into university administrative decision making. Given the massive income stream international students represent, EAP finds itself on the front line between competing views of education as either a transformative social good or a commercial service. From within, the EAP community is developing away from a deficit view of international students, which in turn challenges the view of EAP as being remedial. But from without, EAP is increasingly commodified with EAP centres being run on profit-generating lines or outsourced to private providers. The tension between these two contrasting views of EAP is one of the central themes of this book.
Chapter 3 looks at the history of EAP, arguing that in its origins, EAP sowed the seeds of the current situation whereby the EAP practitioner is a marginalised figure within the academic community, not an academic as much as a provider of academic support. This, I believe, is the real challenge to the book’s effort to put the EAP practitioner on an equal footing in the university. EAP started from the well-intentioned desire to help international students improve their language skills so that they could do better in their degrees. In that sense, EAP was very much about academic support. The book argues, however, that EAP has developed in complexity since then, and the work of the EAP practitioner has gone beyond this supporting role. Suggestions on how to overcome this legacy are discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 3 also provides a helpful overview of the knowledge base in EAP, with clear and comprehensive accounts of Genre Theory, Academic Literacies, Corpus Linguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics. For those entering the field or hoping to better understand the theories that inform EAP practice, this chapter is as helpful an introduction as I have yet come across. It also supports the authors’ argument that EAP has grown in complexity, is informed by research and requires practitioners to draw on a wide range of theory.

Chapters 4 and 5 are of a more practical nature and explore the paths taken by EAP practitioners. Many begin their professional lives as teachers of General English, and this background informs much of their practice. It can also influence their perception within the university. The authors discuss the idea of cultural capital within academia – the amount of capital an academic accrues is determined by their level of specialisation, the years spent acquiring their knowledge base and the number of hurdles they have overcome to reach their current position. This capital can then be leveraged in terms of salary, status and position within the university. Although entry to the EAP profession may be more restricted than to general ELT, it does not require the same qualifications (e.g., PhD) or the publication history of a lecturing post in history, for example. As such, the EAP practitioner lacks the cultural capital needed to leverage a better position within the university – hence the subtitle of this book, Operating on the Edge of Academia. Chapter 5 suggests that the EAP practitioner can acquire cultural capital by developing their scholarship: adding to their qualifications with a PhD (where possible), publishing (e.g., reviews, blogs and papers), or conducting research with colleagues or more established researchers.
The realism that permeates this book is evident in this chapter. These are practical solutions, but suggested with the clear acknowledgement that someone on a teaching-hours-only contract won’t be getting paid for doing any of these things.

Chapter 6 looks beyond the EAP practitioner to EAP organisations, the most obvious being the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP). In many ways BALEAP and other associations have provided opportunities for practitioners to acquire the cultural capital described in Chapters 4 and 5. Whilst lauding these opportunities for professional development and scholarship, the authors lay down a challenge to such organisations to engage more with the working conditions of their members and to advocate when EAP practitioners find themselves facing unfair practices. The final chapter returns to the EAP practitioner and the key objective of this book — to establish the EAP practitioner as a full member of the university on the basis of EAP being seen as a field of academic study in and of itself. This chapter is sociological, arguing that it is necessary to better understand the culture, values and forces that exist in academia and shape the working life and the academic identity of the EAP practitioner.

This is a timely and important work. Although the context is specific to EAP, the precarious working conditions described will resonate with most EFL/ESL teachers, and this book may well inspire a similar one examining the wider ELT context. It is refreshing, at times startling even, to read an academic work that is prepared to discuss the practicalities of our profession (the word ‘contract’ occurs 243 times). This is a wonderful antidote to the old trope of academics and researchers being removed from the realities of those at the chalk face and is in keeping with the sociological/anthropological ambitions of the book. This is an excellent piece of work and essential reading for anyone working in EAP.

**References**


**Stephen Bruce** is an EAP tutor and Programme Manager of the NCUK Pre-Masters Programme at Dublin International Foundation College. His interests include discourse analysis, language assessment and academic writing. Stephen writes at www.eaping.blogspot.com and www.eltresearchbites.com

bruces@tcd.ie

Twitter: @EAPSteve
A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research

Richard Smith & Paula Rebolledo

British Council, 2018

Reviewed by Emily Edwards

A highly practical and user-friendly guide that aims to support teachers in conducting exploratory action research (EAR), this freely accessible PDF publication is an invaluable tool for teachers, teacher educators and managers who are interested in doing and supporting teacher research. The authors, Richard Smith and Paula Rebolledo, are renowned experts in teacher research, who demystify the research process, make EAR engaging and send the clear message that all teachers can explore their classrooms, even in challenging and time-poor contexts. The handbook takes teachers systematically through the process of engaging in EAR, and each step is accompanied by short practical activities, illustrations and photos, and real-life examples, which are taken from the Champion Teachers project conducted in Chile (see Rebolledo, Smith & Bullock, 2016).

The book is cleverly mapped out according to the questions a novice teacher-researcher might ask when they want to engage in EAR for the first time. It is divided into nine main chapters, followed by an appendix. Moving systematically through the book would provide a significant amount of support for a teacher conducting EAR, although in my experience, working with mentors or a peer discussion group would be invaluable in addition to a handbook – as the authors of this book also suggest. Chapter 1 introduces the foundations of EAR in terms of why research is valuable for teachers and how it could help in exploring, understanding and addressing challenging classroom situations. Chapters 2 to 9 are then structured around key questions that mirror the thought and action processes followed by a teacher conducting EAR. Chapter 2, ‘What is teacher-research?’ clearly explains that EAR stems from teaching practice and is based on practical needs rather than academic interests. Chapter 3, ‘What is EAR?’, then goes into more detail about what EAR involves, and why it is valuable.

EAR is a form of teacher research similar to action research (AR), which is now a popular professional development option for English language teachers. As the authors explain, the main difference is that EAR starts with exploration. Imagine a
teacher wants to encourage their students to speak more in class. With EAR, they would start by exploring – finding out why students are not speaking – and then reflect on the data collected before deciding how to proceed. After this first three-step exploratory cycle (plan to explore > explore > analyse and reflect), the next cycle of their research would follow the traditional four steps of AR (plan > act > observe > reflect) by introducing an activity or approach that might promote more speaking and observing what happens.

A particular highlight of the book is Chapter 4 ‘What shall I explore – and what are my questions?’ Narrowing down a research focus and designing research questions can be one of the hardest stages of teacher research, but it is also one of the most important, given that the research project is then designed around those questions. In this chapter, teachers are guided through thinking about problems they are experiencing, with useful categories provided to structure that thinking (‘exploring my perceptions’, ‘exploring others’ perceptions’, ‘exploring behaviour’), and helped with designing SMART questions (study-oriented, measurable, accurate, realistic and topic-focused).

Chapter 5, ‘How can I explore?’, details ways of collecting data from various sources, such as using questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations to explore research questions. Another invaluable section in Chapter 6, ‘What do I find?’, takes the reader through how to ‘code’ qualitative data from interviews or focus groups in a simple yet effective way, which is another challenge novice teacher-researchers often face. Ways of presenting quantitative data (from closed-question surveys) are also discussed.

In Chapter 7, ‘What shall I change?’, the link between EAR and AR is clearly illustrated: at the end of an exploratory cycle, the teacher reflects on whether they need to change anything, and if so, what to change through a subsequent AR cycle. The authors point out that ideas for interventions can derive from many sources, including
students’ suggestions, conversations with other teachers, conferences and published research. At this stage, I would suggest that ELICOS teachers diverge slightly from the non-academic focus of this book and consult reports of research conducted by other teachers (especially AR conducted in the ELICOS context, published in the *English Australia Journal*, and in *Research Notes* by Cambridge Assessment English), and by academic researchers in journals or books if accessible. While existing theories or ideas from the literature may not seem to apply or work in our own classroom contexts, they give us a tool for thinking that can then be adjusted, often quite substantially, to suit our own needs.

The last two chapters, ‘What happens?’ and ‘Where do I go from here?’, discuss ways of analysing the data collected to determine the effects of any interventions that were implemented in the AR cycle and different ways of sharing the research with others. This final step is incredibly important as even through a teacher’s EAR project will be context-specific, there will always be many others who would benefit from knowing about it. Sharing a project’s findings, as well as the challenges faced and any further questions that the research has opened up, is crucial in making EAR a sustainable practice within any educational context. The final ‘Extra material’ section includes a sample questionnaire and sample observation checklist, which provide very useful frameworks for data collection that teachers could easily adapt for their own research.

It certainly makes sense for teachers to get started with research through an exploratory cycle, as EAR promotes, especially for those who have not conducted research before or who are relatively new to English language teaching. While this book is ‘particularly targeted at secondary and primary school teachers working in relatively difficult circumstances’ (p. 3), the engaging format, clear structure and design of this handbook make it an attractive resource for ELICOS teachers. The example EAR projects will resonate with many working in ELICOS, with topics including how to arrange a classroom, how students respond to roleplay activities and using narrative genres (short stories, comics) to develop reading comprehension. Using this handbook, ELICOS teachers could work alone, or ideally in pairs or teams, to better understand their classrooms through EAR. Managers, coordinators or teacher educators could also encourage teams of teachers to use this guide and provide mentoring and support for them through regular meetings, workshops or discussion groups. This approach would be a direct implementation of what I suggest is needed in my article in this issue (Edwards, 2018) in order to foster cultures of inquiry and knowledge-building within ELICOS staffrooms.
References


Emily Edwards is a lecturer in Academic Language and Learning at the University of Technology Sydney. In 2012, while working as an ELICOS teacher, she took part in the English Australia Action Research in ELICOS Program, and then explored perceptions of this program in her PhD. Findings from this research have been published in *ELT Journal, TESOL Quarterly*, and this issue of *English Australia Journal*.

emily.edwards-1@uts.edu.au
Her Own Worst Enemy
A serious comedy about choosing a career
A l i c e  S a v a g e

Alphabet Publishing, 2018

R e v i e w e d  b y  A b i  W r i g h t  &  V i r g i n i a  M a w e r

If life is a stage, then learners of a language are actors who aren’t yet sure of their lines. Some take to this uncertainty very naturally, improvising their utterances with fluency, unfettered by concerns about accuracy. Others, however, muddle through, mumbling their lines, often resorting to the subtle art of mime to communicate their message. In the play presented in this excellent classroom resource, a theatre director tells a young actor:

A play is just words on a page. In table work, you sit with the director and figure out what those words mean. You study the history around the play and you think about the writer’s message. Then, as actors, you decide how you feel when you say the words. (p. 43)

Exploring an L2 persona is parallel to the ‘table work’ that this imaginary director describes in that it can bring the words of another language to life. Learning to accept speaking mistakes, especially as part of the rehearsal process, can act as a bridge between silence and fluency, and speaking the words of others can help to build that bridge.

Alice Savage’s Her Own Worst Enemy allows ESL students to practice integrated language skills through the medium of drama. The story centres on Aida, an 18 year old who has to make the tough decision of what to study after high school and navigate conflicting advice from those around her. Language students who have faced or are about to face similar decisions should therefore be able to empathise with the characters and relate to the story.

Because of its content, the play, and the accompanying activities, would best suit teenage or young-adult learners, but it could easily be adapted for older students. The book is aimed at pre-intermediate or intermediate students and the script is relatively short, running at about 12 minutes. It could be rehearsed in private colleges, language clubs at universities, or as part of migrant programs.
Class activities include explorations of the issues facing the characters, vocabulary matching, reading for inference, summarising and active listening. Further, in addition to practice of pronunciation, including intonation and sentence stress, there is a focus on being able to express emotional intentions, such as annoyance or humour, which is definitely one of the areas that our students struggle with.

Other activities include improvisation and character work, using body language to communicate emotions, analysis of the play, discussions and debates, as well as the pragmatics of reaching conversational goals. This focus on pragmatics is incredibly valuable because it is the very thing that students need to rehearse in the classroom before being unleashed on the world and, as Savage notes, it rarely appears in more traditional textbooks.

Although many of the preparatory tasks are predominantly focused on dramatic interpretation skills and are fairly light on ESL style instruction, the author explains that tasks can be expanded as necessary. This requires the teacher to have a certain level of experience in order to fully exploit the materials. A teacher new to drama, for example, would need to supplement this resource with others providing drama games and warm ups.

As for the final production, options range from scaled-back read-throughs to video productions. There are options to perform the play in segments, mix and match cast members or have different students performing different scenes. Students can also contribute as director, stage manager or videographer. In terms of class members, the play is adaptable so that roles can be played by any nationality or gender. The play also requires no budget and minimal set – it can be performed with just four chairs.

This unusual approach to ESL learning offers an enormous amount of flexibility in the way it is delivered. It could be used as a standalone course, an intensive week-long holiday immersion program, for example, or integrated into a larger program, as part of an ongoing General English course or as a month-long special project. Also, the activities and ideas in the book can be sequenced in any way that best suits learners. This is a distinct advantage.
We think that *Her Own Worst Enemy* is accessible to a range of ESL students and teachers. It is a fantastic introduction to drama for those who would normally shy away from roleplay. By the end of the book, as the introduction states, students should ‘feel a little more confident about their English conversational skills, especially when talking about 21st century jobs and the struggles of young people to prepare for the future’ (p. 11). The book’s lessons are not necessarily ready to go straight into the classroom; rather, they provide a framework to help create a course, or act as a supplement to a traditional ESL course. However, working on this play would provide students with the chance to work collaboratively, a necessary skill for university and the workplace, to develop vital language and social skills, and to have a lot of fun the process.

**Abi Wright** is a drama teacher currently working in ESL. She has recently moved to Australia and is currently researching how to incorporate the ukulele into her lessons.

abiwright@hotmail.co.uk

**Virginia Mawer** is an ESL teacher, writer, speaker, singer, performer and artist. Currently based in Sydney, she has taught across Australia and Italy. Her interests include student engagement, technology and play as work.

Virginia.mawer@gmail.com
Language Teacher Education and Technology
Approaches and practices

JEONG-BAE SON & SCOTT WINDEATT (Eds.)

Bloomsbury, 2017

REVIEWED BY CLARE MCGRATH

Language Teacher Education and Technology is one title in Bloomsbury’s new series Advances in Digital Language Learning and Teaching. The contributors – hailing from universities in Australia, the UK and the USA and with significant experience teaching, training teachers, and researching TESOL education, linguistics and SLA – unstintingly share their experience and insights into the issues and challenges of introducing teachers to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The platforms covered range from learning management systems (e.g., Moodle and Canvas) to mobile phones, and the types of application discussed go from courseware to apps with a language-specific focus (e.g., concordancers), as well as generic software that can be exploited for language learning.

While the authors of each chapter take a different approach, overall they describe their course content, design, practical applications, and the management and integration of technology in language learning. Many also provide specific examples of assessment tasks. Each chapter helpfully concludes with the writer’s reflections on alternative approaches and thoughts about future directions. Topics typically
covered in the descriptions of courses include the development, adoption and use of technology, and the integration of technology into curriculum design, programme evaluation, research methods and language testing. Another constant is the development of students’ critical evaluation skills as well as self-directed learning mindsets and collaborative learning. Along the way, the writers share real problems in, for example, providing hands-on practice with hardware and software, considerations of access in their students’ future teaching contexts, and pedagogical conflicts with prevailing views of language skills as seen in national policies and large-scale testing instruments.

It is worth starting this book with the first chapter as it provides an overview of the courses described in terms of student cohort, mode of delivery, objectives, views of learning, teaching techniques, content and assessment. For this, there is also a very handy and extensive comparison table in the appendix. From here, you can choose your own pathway through Chapters 2 to 10, finishing with the eleventh chapter, which reflects on the role of CALL teacher education.

The whole book represents a highly detailed examination of CALL course design. I found it interesting to explore different course styles, such as those taking a social-constructivist approach, and to see, for example, the how the use of loop input and experiential learning might work in CALL. Other gleanings came from the references to myriad readings, and resources such as the links to the linguistics version of Stanford’s CALL mini-course (for the content not the presentation) in Chapter 10 and the core set of materials from Manchester University’s MA TESOL course unit Language Learning and Technology in Chapter 5. There are other gifts throughout, including rubrics for tasks and evaluations to inspire you, and even post-course survey questions and students’ replies to learn from.

It is worth noting that delivery of the courses is mostly face-to-face as opposed to online though some institutions run versions in both. Coincidentally, the one online course (from St. Michael’s College in the USA, in Chapter 9) is the one most thoroughly detailed. Taking a problem-based learning approach, this chapter is a good example of how to plan for a cohort of students from a range of backgrounds and with varying amounts of experience in teaching and with technology. It inspired me to think of ways to further integrate the use of technology into teacher training and professional development as well as into language learning in and out of class.

This book is recommended for anyone planning or revamping a CALL training unit or working on integration of CALL into other programmes (even though there are a few things you might like to see more coverage of, such as coding and multi-modal literacies). There is plenty for those managing teacher professional development too,
for instance, the example of the integration of the theory and practice of teaching writing skills using Gibbes and Carson’s Activity Theory in Chapter 3. Reading this book will definitely provoke questions about your choices concerning the content and design of teacher training, and about broader issues such as the transfer of existing knowledge and skills related to both pedagogy and technology, and the facilitation of this in your trainees or teaching staff.

 Clare McGrath is a freelance teacher trainer and PD designer/facilitator. Her initial ed-tech teacher training included nifty ways with speed controls on cassette players. She has facilitated online PD courses in Moodle, and most recently facilitated and co-presented a series of webinars about purposeful ways to exploit apps.

clare.p.mcgrath@gmail.com
Jack C. Richards’ 50 Tips for Teacher Development

Jack C. Richards

Cambridge University Press, 2017

Reviewed by Bridgid Seymour-East

Jack C. Richards’ 50 Tips for Teacher Development is part of the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series edited by Scott Thornbury. This pocket edition (A5 in size) is both concise and comprehensive in its suggestions for professional and teacher development. 50 Tips is simply laid out and, as a result, easy to use. Each tip covers two pages. The title gives the tip itself and is followed by a grey box containing the simple, one-sentence outline of the tip’s purpose. The rationale and step-by-step procedure take up the rest of the two pages. The 50 tips are divided into 12 sections, which can then be broadly divided into those that require self-reflection and looking at one’s own teaching and those that require collaboration and looking beyond one’s own classroom and techniques. They focus on critical reflection, the language we use in the classroom, expanding our knowledge, research skills and teaching skills, and sharing our knowledge and skills.

The activities that Richards suggests range from assessing needs and goals to researching and extending teaching and learning knowledge. They include the obvious recommendations of participating in observations, workshops, conferences and online forums, as well as the less obvious suggestions of keeping a journal, researching and reviewing coursebooks, and even setting up reading groups.
Professional development can be difficult due to the wide-ranging teaching settings teachers find themselves in. It can also be challenging keeping up with changes and developments in the industry itself. Despite the simplicity of this handbook, there are, as its title suggests, 50 tips. Therefore, irrespective of your teaching context, there will be a number of tips that will work for you or your staffroom. Just as we all supplement lessons in the classroom and have our own personal teaching style, there are many ways to advance personal development. What I like about this handbook is that Richards has covered such a broad range of ideas. I have often felt limited in my own professional development, but these tips opened my eyes to some simple ways in which I could rethink this area and help facilitate professional learning among my colleagues.

I particularly liked those tips which require collaboration and the sharing of experiences. Tip 36, ‘Use Narrative Frames to Explore Teaching’, stood out for me. This activity encourages groups of teachers to discuss stories (e.g., ‘My First Year Teaching’ and ‘Critical Incidents’) and their implications so as to learn from one another. Up to 10 narrative frames are given – a narrative frame is a sentence starter that provides the skeleton of a story with examples including ‘At first I found teaching to be …’ ‘The most difficult part of teaching for me was …’ and ‘The advice I would give someone who is starting out in teaching would be …’ – and teachers can fill these out before they come to a group discussion. Hearing another more experienced teacher share a story of a critical incident can both comfort and provide support for a less experienced teacher who may have gone through something similar and felt at a loss. Although many staffrooms are incredibly collegial, this does not necessarily mean all issues and classroom management problems are discussed, and many inexperienced teachers may be too nervous to ask for help. Tips such as this and Tip 21, ‘Use Clips from Movies or Extracts from Fiction to Explore Teaching’, provide a less confronting forum for sharing challenging experiences. Another positive aspect of this book is that many of the tips can be used together and link back to one another. For example, Tips 7 and 8 look at how you use questions and give feedback, while 38 and 39 require you to monitor teacher talking time and your action zones. (By thinking about our action zones, we can consider our interaction patterns in the classroom. How are students seated? Do we talk and engage equally with groups in the classroom? This therefore encourages us to think about where we stand in the room and to monitor class feedback and who answers questions.) These are vital aspects of a teacher’s
everyday classroom management and practice, and Richards’ tips show that with some self-reflection we can improve in these areas.

Not only are the tips useful for an individual looking to enhance their teaching, the book also provides countless tips for teaching institutions. Staffrooms tired of traditional workshops led by senior staff can, for example, turn to Tip 23 ‘Form a Reading Group’, which promotes active engagement with professional articles and books, rather than simply putting this reading material on the bookshelf and hoping it gets read.

I can find little to fault in this handbook yet, notwithstanding my impression of the majority of tips being extremely positive, I am clearly not going to be enthralled by all of the ideas or attracted to using them all. But for me, that is the charm of Jack C. Richards’ 50 Tips for Teacher Development — it caters to everyone; new and experienced teachers as well as senior staff and academic managers. It is a highly practical handbook that is an essential addition to any staffroom bookshelf.

Bridgid Seymour-East is the Assistant Director of Studies at Navitas English, where she has been working for almost 17 years. She specialises in teaching Cambridge Preparation courses.

Bridgid.SeymourEast@navitas.com
Mindset for IELTS
An official Cambridge IELTS course

Level 1: Peter Crosthwaite, Susan Hutchison Claire Wijayatilake & Natasha De Souza
Level 2: Peter Crosthwaite, Natasha De Souza, & Marc Loewenthal
Level 3: Greg Archer & Claire Wijayatilake

Cambridge University Press, 2017, 2018

Reviewed by Karen Haire

In our staffroom, there is a continuing search for the ‘perfect’ IELTS coursebook: one which is clear, provides exam strategies and covers all the skills, as well as the grammar and common topic-specific vocabulary that candidates require, without being repetitive, too easy or too difficult for students. It’s quite a big ask and numerous publishers have offered up their series over the years, with most succeeding in some areas while falling flat in others. Mindset for IELTS is Cambridge University Press’ latest contribution to the ever growing pile of coursebooks for IELTS classes, but thankfully, it really does stand out from the crowd.

Designed for those preparing for the academic version of the test, the Mindset for IELTS books come in four levels: Foundation (for students with a target IELTS score of 4.5) [not reviewed here], Level 1 (target IELTS score of 5.5), Level 2 (target score of 6.5) and Level 3 (target score of 7.5). These levels don’t account for many students who come with a score of 6.5 and are looking for a 7. However, for such students, I found that Level 3 was easily adaptable; it’s suitable for these aspirational students while still being challenging for the higher-level students in the class. Each of the levels consists of a Student’s Book of either 8 or 10 units and a Teacher’s Book. Both of these also come with codes allowing both teachers and students to access online materials, including the audio files, an introduction to each of the IELTS tests, and supplementary online modules providing reading, writing, speaking and listening practice, as well as additional grammar and vocabulary input. There is also an accompanying ‘Testbank’, which offers authentic online practice tests.
The first thing that is apparent when looking at the *Mindset* books is their organisation. Each unit has one topic and is subdivided into the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. This means that if a teacher is following the book and trying to cover one unit a week, they should easily be able to discuss a range of topics, while still being sure that they are teaching each skill and covering the different exam tasks. This separation of each unit into the skills has the additional advantages that speaking is given its own section, with defined strategy, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation activities that all build on one another, rather than simply being used to fill spaces between other skill or task types, which has been an issue in many previous IELTS coursebooks.

Additionally, within each of the skills sections there is a clear progression. In a reading section, for example, there will be a vocabulary lead-in followed by a skimming and scanning exercise, then one or two exam task types with tip boxes included on the page. This is then followed by a focus on an exam skill, such as paraphrasing, a grammar focus section and a final exam-style reading, which includes the task types, vocabulary and grammar that have been covered. This style of unit is extremely easy for teachers and students to follow, and it is clear how each part of the lesson builds towards an exam-focused outcome. Students are also given very straightforward explanations of the way the task types work and what skills are required in order to complete them successfully. The other great part of this style of unit is that it is easy for teachers to adapt any given section. Say they feel their students need more vocabulary; it is a simple matter to extend the lead in. Or if they feel that their students require extra help with the grammar, there is a clear place to slot in additional exercises, or to skip them if they feel their students don’t require it. I found that the extra consolidation practice at the end of each chapter provided a great tool for checking if the students really had understood how they were supposed to complete each task.

One drawback of this repeated ‘present, practice, produce’ style of chapter is that it could become repetitive for students and teachers. However, the good news is
that the reading and listening texts are generally pretty interesting and even for something like form completion, the writers have managed to include activities within the lesson that are designed to make students think and to challenge them.

The only real negative of the Mindset books is that they are, unfortunately, let down by an abysmal contents page. The contents gives nothing but the topic of the unit and the page numbers of where each skill section starts. There is no detail at all of the task types, vocabulary, grammar or anything that is involved in any of the skill sections. This means that if a teacher would like, for example, to do a particular writing task type with their students in a particular week (i.e., not following the book from unit to unit) they have two options. One is to trawl through each writing section of the student book to find the exact writing type that they want (an activity which certainly palls pretty quickly), and the second is to hunt around online for the official ‘Content Map’ of the book. Interestingly, this map of the book, which acts as an actual contents page, is not found in any of the books’ accompanying online materials, but rather in the Cambridge University Press online catalogue.

Despite this glaring and irritating issue, in the Mindset for IELTS books Cambridge University Press and their authors have done an excellent job of creating approachable, interesting and easy to follow IELTS coursebooks, which really work in the classroom for both students and teachers.

Karen Haire is a Senior Teacher at Navitas English Hyde Park. She loves teaching IELTS, breaking down complex ideas in class and helping students do the best they can on the exam.

Karen.Haire@navitas.com
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English Australia
PO Box 1437
Darlinghurst
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Telephone: (02) 9264 4700

General email: easec@englishaustralia.com.au

Executive Editor: journal@englishaustralia.com.au

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